

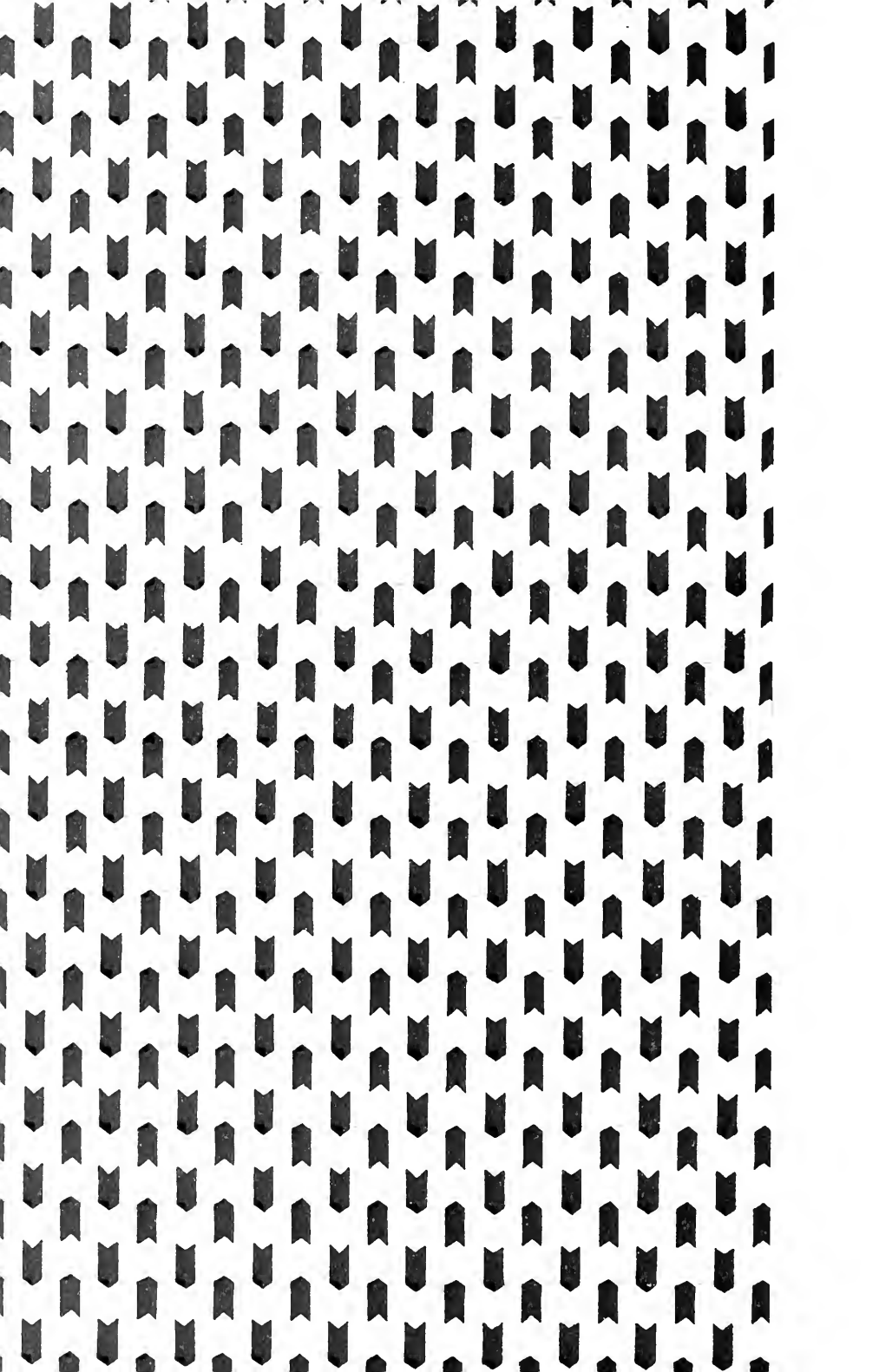
The Jewess of Toledo
Esther

FRANZ GRILLPARZER

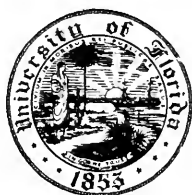
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THE
JEWESS OF TOLEDO

ESTHER

Dramas
by
Franz Grillparzer

Translated by
Arthur Burkhard



THE REGISTER PRESS
YARMOUTH PORT, MASSACHUSETTS

1953

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YARMOUTH PORT, MASSACHUSETTS
U. S. A.

THE JEWESS OF TOLEDO

Historical Tragedy in Five Acts

by

Franz Grillparzer

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THE JEWESS OF TOLEDO

C H A R A C T E R S

ALFONSO VIII, the NOBLE, *King of Castile.*

ELEANOR OF ENGLAND, DAUGHTER OF HENRY II, *his wife.*

THE PRINCE, *their son.*

MANRIQUE, COUNT OF LARA, *Almirante of Castile.*

DON GARCERAN, *his son.*

DOÑA CLARA, *Lady in Waiting to the Queen.*

THE QUEEN'S MAID.

ISAAC, *the Jew.*

ESTHER	}	<i>his daughters.</i>
RACHEL		

RAMIRO, *the King's page.*

NOBLES, LADIES OF THE COURT, PETITIONERS, SERVANTS AND CITIZENS

PLACE OF THE ACTION: TOLEDO AND VICINITY

TIME: ABOUT 1195 A.D.

ACT I

In the Royal Garden of Toledo.

Enter Isaac, Rachel and Esther

ISAAC

Stay, go not inside this garden!
You must know it is forbidden!
When the king here takes his pleasure,
Jews must never — God will judge them!—
Jews must never enter here.

RACHEL

sings

La-la, la-la.

ISAAC

Do you hear me?

RACHEL

Yes, I hear you.

ISAAC

Will you heed me?

RACHEL

Hear, but will not heed you.

ISAAC

Oy, oy, oy! How God does try me!
Yet I gave the poor my penny,
Said my prayers, observed the fasts,
Never tasted foods forbidden,
Oy, and yet God tries me thus!

RACHEL
to *Esther*

Oh, what makes you pull my sleeve?
Here I am, here I will stay.
I want once to see the king,
See the court and how they act,
All their gold and precious jewels.
He is white and pink, they tell me,
Young and fair: I want to see him.

ISAAC

And in case the servants catch you?

RACHEL

I would tease till I got free.

ISAAC

Like your mother, I suppose?
She too leered at handsome Christians,
Hankered after Egypt's flesh-pots;
Had she not been closely watched,
I might think — may God forgive! —
That your folly came through her,
Heritage of loathsome Christians;
But my first wife, her I praise,

to *Esther*

Praise your mother, good like you,
E'en though poor. What profit had I
Of the riches of that second?
She spent money as it pleased her,
Giving feasts and showy banquets,
Buying finery and jewels.
Like her mother is this daughter!
Decked with trinkets, all about her,
Clad in bright and showy raiment,
Proud like her of Babylon.

RACHEL

sings

Am I not fair,
Am I not rich?

Though vexed they be,
What's that to me? La-la, la-la.

ISAAC

Thus she walks in costly shoes;
Wears them out without a thought,
Every step costs me a threepence.
Precious stones set in her earrings,
If a thief comes, takes them from her,
Or if lost, what eye can find them?

RACHEL

takes off an earring

Watch as I remove and hold it,
How it shines and how it shimmers!
Yet I value it so little,
If it strikes me, you can have it;

to Esther

Even cast it from me. Look!

moves her hand as if to throw the earring away

ISAAC

runs in the direction indicated

Dear, oh dear! Where did it fall?

Dear, oh dear! How can I find it?

searches in the bushes

ESTHER

What possessed you? That fine jewel —

RACHEL

Do you think I am so foolish
And would throw away a treasure?
Look you, in my hand I hold it,
Put it in my ear again,
White and small to grace my cheek.

ISAAC

searches still

Lost, alas!

RACHEL

Come, look here, father,
See, the jewel has been found.
I was jesting.

ISAAC

Then may God — !
Jesting, were you! And now, come!

RACHEL

Father, anything but that.
I, for once, must see the king;
He, the king, see me; yes, me.
When he comes and when he asks:
Who, pray, is that pretty Jewess?
Tell your name, girl. — Rachel, Sire,
Isaac's Rachel, I shall say.
He, perhaps, will pinch my cheek.
All will call me pretty Rachel.
Though with jealousy they burst,
Though it vex them, what care I?

ESTHER

Father!

ISAAC

Yes?

ESTHER

There come the mighty.

ISAAC

Lord of Hosts, what will befall me?
Rehoboam and his vassals!
Follow me!

RACHEL

But father, listen.

ISAAC

Well, then stay. You, Esther, come!
 Leave the foolish girl alone here.
 Let the unclean-handed see her,
 Let him touch her, even slay her!
 She herself has wished it so.
 Esther, come!

RACHEL

Do, father, stay!

ISAAC

Hurry on! Come, Esther, come!

leaves

RACHEL

Don't leave me alone! I tell you!
 Wait! — They're leaving — Heavens above!
 Don't leave me alone! I tell you!
 They are coming. — Sister! Father!
hurries after them

*Enter the king, the queen, Manrique de Lara
and attendants*

KING
on entering

Nay, let the crowds draw near! I do not mind;
Whoever calls me king, he points me out
Among the many as the highest; thus
The people are a part of mine own self.

turns to the queen

And you, no lesser portion of my being,
I bid you welcome in this loyal town,
Yes, welcome in Toledo's ancient walls.
Look round about and let your heart beat faster,
For here you stand beside my spirit's fount.
Here is no square, no house, no stone, no tree,
That is not witness of my childhood lot.
As I in fear before my uncle's wrath,
That evil man, who ruled Leon as king,
An orphan child, whose mother early died,
Through lands now hostile, though my own, took flight,
Castilians leading me from town to town,
As secretly as though they hid a theft,
Since death kept menacing both host and guest,
My footsteps watched, beset from every side,
Brave men, among them such as Don Estevan
Illan, long since within his cool turf-covered grave,
And like this man, Manrique, Count of Lara,
Conveyed me here, the stronghold of our foe,
And hid me in the tower of Saint Roman,
That you can see high over yonder roofs.

There I lived hidden but in time they sowed
 The seed of rumor in the burghers' ears.
 Then on Ascension Day when worshippers
 In throngs assembled by the temple door,
 They led me out upon the parapet
 And showed me to the people, calling down :
 Here in your very midst, here stands your king,
 The heir of ancient princes ; of their right
 And of your rights the willing champion.
 I was a child and wept, or so they said.
 But I can hear it still, that piercing cry,
 One word from out a thousand bearded throats,
 A thousand swords grasped in a single hand,
 The people's hand. God gave us victory,
 Leon was forced to flee ; and on and on,
 I, more a standard than a warrior yet,
 An army all about me, crossed my lands
 And won us triumphs with my boyish smile ;
 They taught me meanwhile, gave me constant care.
 Blood from their wounds became my mother's milk.
 While other princes bear the name of father
 Of their own folk, I call myself the son,
 For what I am, I owe their loyal help.

MANRIQUE

If everything you are, most noble Sire,
 Is fruit of our example, of our words,
 Then we accept your thanks and may rejoice
 If what we taught you, if the care we took
 Show now in so great fame, such valiant deeds,
 Thanks then are due us both, to us and you.

to the queen

Well may you rest your lovely eyes on him :
 Of all the kings who ever ruled in Spain
 Not one compares with him in noble thought.
 Old age most often turns to finding fault,
 I too am old and carp and cavil much,
 And often when in council my opinions

Were vanquished by his high and princely word,
 I. angered secretly, — I mean, in passing —
 Sought out some evil charge against my king
 To prove, God knows how gladly, some misdeed;
 Yet always I returned, reduced to shame,
 The guilt was mine, while he stayed undefiled.

KING

Why, Lara, can one teach and flatter, too?
 But let us not dispute of this or that;
 Am I not bad, the better then for you,
 Although I fear a man devoid of fault
 Might be devoid of excellence as well;
 For as a tree with roots away from light
 Draws up a somewhat turbid nurture from the soil,
 So does the tree trunk known as wisdom draw,
 Though its high branches reach to heaven's door,
 Its nutriment and strength from turbid earth,
 Man's mortal dust, so close allied to sin.
 Can he be just who never has been hard?
 He who is mild, is seldom void of weakness,
 The brave become too violent in war.
 The faults we vanquish are our only virtue,
 Without a struggle there can be no strength.
 They never gave me time to go astray:
 A boy, a helmet on my trembling head,
 A lad, with lance in hand astride a horse,
 Eyes always turned where hostile menace lurked,
 I had no glance to see the joy life holds,
 And all that charms and lures, seemed strange and far.
 That women lived and breathed, I came to know
 In church the day I wedded her, my wife,
 A woman faultless, if there ever was,
 Whom I might love, quite frankly, even more,
 Were sometimes need, instead of praise, of pardon too.

to the queen

Now, now, fear not, why it was but a jest!
 Yet one does wrong to praise a day not ended

Or call the devil, lest he may appear.

But now instead of argument let us
 Enjoy the respite granted us in peace.
 The feuds within our land for once are stilled.
 The Moor, they say, prepares himself anew
 And hopes his kin in Africa will help,
 Ben Jussuf and his battle-seasoned troops.
 New war will come and with it new distress.
 Let us till then, our bosoms free for peace,
 Draw in the breath of unaccustomed joy.
 Are there no messages? — But I forget!
 Do you not look about you, Leonore,
 To learn what we have done for your delight?

QUEEN

What should I see?

KING

Alas, poor Almirante!

We missed the mark, although we bravely tried.
 For days and weary weeks we have been digging
 And hoped we might transform this garden plot,
 That bears mere oranges and gives but shade,
 Into a pattern England makes and loves,
 The austere land of her, my austere wife.
 Alas, she smiles, in silence shakes her head. —
 So are Britannia's children, each and all:
 You must cleave closely to established forms
 Or be rejected with a haughty smile.
 At least admit we meant well, Leonore,
 And briefly give these men a word of thanks,
 Who for us here, God knows how long, have toiled.

QUEEN

I thank you, noble sirs!

KING

Let us move on!

The day is marred. I hoped I might have shown
 Some meadows, cottages in English style

And this and that your garden will contain;
 All that is wrong. Do not pretend, my love!
 It is so; let us think of it no more.
 Some time for state affairs will thus be left,
 Ere Spanish wine add spice to Spanish fare.
 No messenger has yet come from the front?
 We chose Toledo with this end in view
 That we be near advices from the foe;
 And yet no messenger?

MANRIQUE

O Sire —

KING

Yes, what?

MANRIQUE

A messenger has come.

KING

Well, then!

MANRIQUE

points to the queen

Not now.

KING

My wife is used to council and to war,
 The queen shares all decisions with the king.

MANRIQUE

In this case more than any message, though,
 The messenger himself —

KING

And who?

MANRIQUE

My son.

KING

Ah, Garceran! Have him brought in!
to the queen

Remain!

Our young friend greatly sinned, we grant you that,
 When he, disguised, stole into women's quarters
 To look in secret on the girl he loved.

You, Doña Clara, need not bow your head.
 The man is honest although young and rash,
 A comrade of my early boyhood days;
 Now failure to forgive were even worse
 Than frivolous acceptance of his fault.
 Of penance he by now has done enough
 In months of exile on the far frontier.

At a nod from the queen, one of her ladies leaves
 And yet she goes: O modesty,
 More chaste than chastity!

Enter Garceran

KING

Be welcome, friend.

Give me your news. Are men there all afraid
 As you, and like you, shy as little girls?
 If so, our realm's defense is poor enough.

GARCERAN

A man of courage, Sire, fears not a foe;
 But noble ladies' righteous wrath unmans.

KING

When wrath is righteous, yes! And do not think
 My views of usage and propriety
 Are less severe, less serious than my wife's.
 Yet wrath must have its limits, like all else.
 Once more, then, Garceran, give me your news.
 Our enemy, despite the peace, makes trouble?

GARCERAN

We fought as though it was mere make-believe,
 With bloody wounds on their side, Sire, and ours;
 This peace so-called so much resembled war
 That broken faith alone distinguished them.
 Of late the hostile forces have not stirred.

KING

Ah, that is bad.

GARCERAN

We think so, too, believing
 They now make ready for a fiercer blow.
 For daily ships convey men and provisions
 From Africa to Cadiz, so we hear,
 Where secretly a mighty army forms,
 Which Jussuf, now become the ruler of Morocco,
 Will join with forces he recruited there;
 They then may launch the blow that threatens us.

KING

Well, if they strike, we blow for blow strike back.
 Their king leads them; just so your king leads you;
 And if God lives, as He most surely lives,
 And justice dwell upon His lips, I hope
 For victory with justice and with God.
 The peasant's bitter need I pity most,
 Placed highest, I expect the hardest lot.
 Let all my people congregate in church,
 Beseeching God, who grants the victory;
 See that the sacred relics are exposed,
 That all may pray who soon will join the fight.

GARCERAN

Without this word your wish has been fulfilled;
 Bells toll their summons out across the land
 And to the temples crowding, people come;
 Their zeal has though, mistaken as so often,
 Turned on adherents of that other creed
 Whom trade and profit scattered through our land.
 And here and there a Jew was roughly treated.

KING

And you stand idly by? I swear to God:
 Who trusts himself to me, him I protect;
 Their faith is their concern, their conduct mine.

GARCERAN

The people call them spies in Moorish pay.

KING

None can betray the things he does not know,
And as I always have despised their Mammon,
I never yet have asked for their advice.
No Jew nor Christian, only I decide
What is to be. Hence, by your heads, I say —

A WOMAN'S VOICE
from without

Help us!

KING

What's wrong?

GARCERAN

There is an old man, Sire,
He seems to be a Jew, pursued by guards.
Two girls are with him. One of them — see there! —
Runs toward us.

KING

Right, for here she will be safe.
God's lightning blast the man who does her harm.
calls into the wings

Come here to us!

Enter Rachel, in flight

RACHEL

O God, they'll kill me next.

My father, too! Is nowhere any help?

sees the queen and kneels before her

Most high and noble lady, give me shelter,
Stretch out your hand and keep your servant safe.
And I will serve you, too; not Jewess, slave.

*tries to take the hands of the queen, who turns
away from her*

RACHEL

arises

Here too no help, fear everywhere, and death.
Where shall I flee?

Ah, look, here stands a man
 Whose eyes like moonlight shed cool rays and comfort,
 And all about him tells of majesty.
 You can protect me, sir, oh, and you will.
 I do not want to die, not die. No, no!

*throws herself down before the king, her hands
 clasp his right foot, her head is bowed to
 the ground*

KING

to several who approach

Leave her! Fright almost robs her of her senses,
 Her trembling makes me tremble with her too!

RACHEL

sits up

And everything I have,

takes off her bracclet

my bracelet here,

The necklace, also this most precious cloth,

*takes off a cloth she wears like a shawl around
 her neck*

It cost my father forty pounds, no less.

Real Indian weave, I gladly give it up,

But spare my life, I do not want to die!

sinks back to her former position

Isaac and Esther are led in

KING

How has this man offended?

MANRIQUE

as all remain silent

Sire, you know

It is forbidden that this people enter

The royal gardens when the court is here.

KING

Well, if it is forbidden, I allow it.

ESTHER

He is no spy, Sire, but a simple merchant.
The letters that he carries are in Hebrew,
Not Arabic, not in the Moorish tongue.

KING

I know, I know!

points to Rachel

And this girl?

ESTHER

Is my sister!

KING

Then help her up and take her home.

RACHEL

as Esther approaches her

No, no!

They will arrest me, they will bear me off
And surely slay me.

points to the ornaments she has taken off

Here my ransom lies.

Here let me stay and let me sleep a while.

lays her cheek against the king's knee

Here I found safety, here a place to rest.

QUEEN

to the king

Will you not go?

KING

You see that I am caught.

QUEEN

You may be caught, but I am free. I go.

exit with her attendants

KING

One more rebuff! With their false modesty
They bring about what they would drive away.

to Rachel, sternly

I say to you, get up! — Give back her scarf
And let her go.

RACHEL

O, Sire, a little while —

My limbs are lamed — I fear I cannot walk.

*rests her elbow on her knee, supporting her head
with her hand*

KING

steps back

And has she always been so timid?

ESTHER

Not at all.

A while ago she acted all too bold,

Defied us, wanted, sir, to see you.

KING

Me?

The cost was high.

ESTHER

And usually at home

She likes to clown and plays with man or dog

And makes us laugh, however grave we are.

KING

I almost wish, indeed, she were a Christian

And here at court, where life is dull enough,

A bit of jest would prove a welcome change.

Ho, Garceran!

GARCERAN

Illustrious Sire and King!

ESTHER

occupied with Rachel

Stand up! Stand up!

RACHEL

*rises, takes off Esther's necklace, placing it with
the other things*

Give everything you have,

It is my ransom.

ESTHER

Good, so let it be.

KING

How seems all this to you?

GARCERAN

To me, Sire, seems?

KING

Do not pretend! Yours is a practiced eye.

I never looked on women much myself,

But she seems fair to me.

GARCERAN

She is, my lord!

KING

Then summon strength, for you shall lead her home.

RACHEL

*stands in the centre of the stage, with trembling
knees and head bowed down, pushing up
her sleeve*

Put on my bracelet. — Careful now, that hurts.

My necklace too — But that is on, of course.

The scarf you keep, I feel so hot and choked.

KING

See she gets home!

GARCERAN

But, Sire, I fear —

KING

Yes, what?

GARCERAN

The crowd is much wrought up —

KING

You may be right.

Although the king's sole word is shield enough,

'Tis better to avoid all provocation.

ESTHER

arranges Rachel's dress at her throat

See how your dress is pulled awry and torn.

KING

Take her for now to any of the shelters

Within the garden, then, when evening comes —

GARCERAN

Your further orders, Sire?

KING

What's that? I see!

to Esther and Rachel

Are you not ready yet?

ESTHER

We are, my lord.

KING

to Garceran

And when the evening comes and crowds disperse,
Then take them home, and so there is an end.

GARCERAN

Come, lovely heathen!

KING

Heathen? That is nonsense!

ESTHER

to Rachel, who prepares to leave

Will you not thank the king for so much grace?

RACHEL

still exhausted, turns to the king

Receive my thanks, lord, for your strong protection!

Would I were not this poor and wretched thing,

with a motion of her hand across her throat

This neck, made shorter by the hangman's hand,

This breast a shield to guard you from your foe —

But that you do not wish.

KING

A pretty shield.

Be on your way, with God. And — Garceran,

lowers his voice

I do not wish this girl, this ward of mine,

By any rude or forward acts to be

Insulted, nay, disturbed —

RACHEL

with her hand on her forehead

I cannot walk.

KING

as Garceran offers her his arm

Withdraw your arm! You let her sister help her.

And you, old man, keep watch, look to your daughter,
The world is evil, guard your treasure well.

Exit Rachel with her kin, led by Garceran

KING

watches them as they go

She falters still. Her being, soul and body,
A sea of fear with wave succeeding wave.

puts down his foot

I feel she held my foot so tightly clasped
It almost pains. — How strange in fact it is,
A craven man quite justly is despised,
While woman shows her strength by being weak.
You, Almirante, what think you of this?

MANRIQUE

I think the way, Sire, you now punished him,
My son, was no less subtle than severe.

KING

I, punished?

MANRIQUE

Yes, selecting him to guard this rabble.

KING

The punishment may, friend, not be so hard.

I never sought out women much myself,

points to his attendants

These, though, may take a different point of view.

But now away with such confusing scenes.

We go to dine, I must renew my strength,

And when we pledge this joyous day with festive toast

Let each recall to mind — the thoughts he treasures most.

Stand not on rank or order! Go! Lead on!

*Exit the king between courtiers drawn up in
ranks on either side of the stage*

The curtain falls.

ACT II

Shallow stage, showing part of the garden. To the right a garden-house with a balcony and a door to which several steps lead up.

Enter Garceran, through the door

GARCERAN

Thus I shall save myself while I still can.
The girl is fair, and something of a fool;
But love is folly, so a foolish woman
Is more a danger than the slyest one.

Besides, I must restore my good repute,
And bring my ardent love for Doña Clara —
Least prone to speak of all who never speak —
Again to honor while there still is time;
A wise man counts escape a victory.

Enter a page of the king

PAGE

Don Garceran!

GARCERAN

What, Robert, brings you here?

PAGE

The king, my lord, commanded me to see
If you still tarried here with her, your ward.

GARCERAN

If we still tarried? He commanded — ! Friend,
You were to see if I had strayed upstairs?

Tell him the girl is in the garden-house
And I outside. That news will be sufficient.

PAGE

He comes himself!

GARCERAN

His Majesty!

Enter the king wrapped in a cloak; exit the page

KING

Well, friend,

Still here?

GARCERAN

Was it not you yourself who ordered
That not until the dark of evening came —

KING

Yes, yes, I did! But to my later judgment
It seems far wiser that you move by day —
They call you bold.

GARCERAN

And so, my lord, you think — ?

KING

I think you honor what the king has pledged
Who would not have molested what he guards.
But habit is the master of mankind,
Our wills will often only what they must.
And so be off. But what about your ward?

GARCERAN

To start with, there was weeping without end,
But time brings comfort, as the saying goes;
And so it was; scarce had the fright worn off,
When cheerful moods, yes, merriment, returned.
Then only did one see each shining thing;
The silk upon the walls was much admired,
The curtains' worth was figured by the yard,
Now all has been arranged and there is calm.

KING

And does she seem at all to long for home?

GAR CERAN

Almost, and then again, it seems not so.
The careless rarely fret ahead of time.

KING

You did not fail, of course, to cast the lure
Of talk before her, as you always do?
How did she take it?

GAR CERAN

Not unkindly, Sire.

KING

You lie! — You hardly know your luck, my boy!
You hover like a bird in cloud-free skies
And swoop down only where a berry lures,
And at a glance know what is best to do.
I am a king and words I speak cause fear,
But I should be afraid myself if faced
The first time by some woman quite unknown.
Just how do you begin? Teach me a bit,
I am a novice in such things as those,
Am not much better than a grown-up child.
You heave a sigh?

GAR CERAN

Fie, Sire, how out of style!

KING

Well then, make eyes? And you Sir Gander stare
Till Lady Goose stares back. Is that the way?
And then perhaps you take your lute in hand
Below the balcony, as you would here,
To sing some croaking ditty while the moon,
A wan procurer, sparkles through the trees
And flowers' intoxicating scents arise,
Until the favoring moment is at hand,
The father, brother, — husband even, leaves
The house, maybe on similar errand bent,
And then her servant softly whispers: Pst!
You enter, feel some fingers, soft and warm,
Grasp yours; they lead you through a maze of halls

Which, darker than the grave, and on and on,
 Increase desire, till scent of sandalwood
 And pallid light that shines beneath the door
 Give notice that your lovely goal is near.
 A door swings back, and there where candles glow,
 Against dark velvet nestling, limbs relaxed,
 With ropes of pearls around her gleaming arm,
 Her head thrown gently back, reclines your love.
 Her golden hair — not golden, I mean black! —
 Those coal-black raven locks — and all the rest!
 You see how well you teach me, Garceran;
 What difference if Christian, Moorish,—Jewish!

GARCERAN

As frontier fighters we have certain rights
 To Moorish women; but a Jewess, Sire —

KING

Yes, now pretend you choose and pick your fare!
 I wager if the girl we have within
 Had merely glanced at you, your love would flame.
 I love them not, these people, but I know
 That what disfigures them, we cause ourselves.
 We lame them, then are angry if they limp.
 And something great moreover, Garceran,
 Is in this tribe of restless, roving shepherds:
 We are but of today, but they extend
 Back to creation's cradle, back to times
 When God in Eden walked about with man,
 When Cherubim were guests of patriarchs,
 The triune God was judge and justice both.
 Amid this world of fancy, truth is found
 In Cain and Abel, in Rebecca's wisdom,
 In Jacob, wooing Rachel with his service —
 That girl, what is her name?

GARCERAN

I know not.

KING

Ah?

In Ahasuerus, who held out his sceptre
 Toward Esther who, his wife, herself a Jewess,
 Became the guardian angel of her race,
 The Christian like the Moslem finds his line
 Goes back to them, this oldest folk, the first;
 So it is they doubt us, not we doubt them.
 And if, like Esau, they have sold their birthright,
 We ten times daily crucify our Lord
 By sins that we commit, by our misdeeds,
 While they, the Jews, have done the deed but once.

Now let us go. Or rather, you remain!
 Escort her home, take note of where she lives.
 Perhaps sometime when weary cares oppress me,
 I'll visit her, take pleasure in her thanks.

*about to leave, hears a noise in the garden and
 stops*

What now?

GARCERAN

Some noise within. It seems almost
 They give your lately lavished praise the lie
 By quarrels among themselves.

KING

walks toward the house

Why should they quarrel?

Enter Isaac, coming from the garden-house

ISAAC

speaks over his shoulder to someone within
 Then stay here if you will and risk your necks!
 You barely got off once. I'll save my skin.

KING

Ask what is wrong!

GARCERAN

What is it, my good man?

ISAAC
to Garceran

Ah you, kind nobleman, who are our guard.
 My darling Rachel speaks so much of you,
 You won her heart.

KING
 Come, come! No idle talk —
 ISAAC

Who is that man?

GARCCERAN
 No matter; you reply.
 Why was there such disturbance overhead?

ISAAC
speaks up at the window behind
 You see? Your time is coming. Wait a bit.
to Garceran

Now you yourself have seen my little Rachel,
 Seen how she wept and moaned and beat her breasts,
 Her mind half crazed. Well, sir, upon my life,
 Scarce did she know the time of danger passed,
 When her old wantonness returned in force;
 She laughed, she danced and sang, half mad again;
 She moved the sacred objects from their shrine
 That death protects — and makes the noise you hear.
 Does not a chain of keys hang from her waist?
 Well, these she tries on every cupboard, sir,
 That stands along the wall, and opens it;
 Within hang garments, now, of every sort:
 A beggar next a king, and angels, devils,
 A motley crew —

KING
aside to Garceran
 Left from the masquerade.

ISAAC
 From these she chooses for herself a crown
 Adorned with plumes — not gold, but gilded tin,

You tell it by the weight, worth twenty pence —
 Then round her shoulders hangs a trailing gown
 And says she is the queen.

speaks again over his shoulder

Just so, you fool!

And even worse — the room nearby contains
 A picture of our king, whom God preserve!
 She takes it from the wall, bears it about,
 Calls it my husband, speaks with loving words
 And hugs it to her breast.

*The king goes with determined steps toward the
 garden-house*

GARCERAN

My royal master!

ISAAC

shrinks back

God help me!

KING

with calm voice, as he stands on the steps

I would see that farce near by.

Besides, the time draws near that you depart.
 I would not have you miss the hour that serves.
 But you, old man, must come. For not alone,
 Not unobserved, would I approach your daughters.

enters the house

ISAAC

Was that the king? God help me!

GARCERAN

Go along!

ISAAC

And if he draws his sword, we all are doomed!

GARCERAN

Go in with him! And as for having fear,
 I am afraid, not for your daughter, nor for you.

*pushes Isaac, who still hesitates, through the
 door, and follows him*

Exeunt both

Large hall in the garden-house. A door at the rear, left; another at the front, right.

Rachel, a plumed crown on her head and a gold embroidered mantle around her shoulders, is trying to drag an armchair from the room at the right. Esther has come in through the main entrance

RACHEL

Here shall this big chair stand, here in the middle.

ESTHER

In Heaven's name now, Rachel, pray take care;
Your rashness else will plunge us in misfortune.

RACHEL

The king has given us this house to use;
So while we live here, it belongs to us.

They have dragged the chair to the centre of the stage

RACHEL

looks at herself

My train looks well on me, I think. And you?
And when I nod my head, these feathers nod.
One thing is lacking still — and — wait, I'll get it.
goes back through the side door

ESTHER

Would we were far from here and safe at home.
And father is not back, whom she drove off.

RACHEL

comes back with a picture without a frame
A portrait of the king, slipped from its frame,
This I shall take along.

ESTHER

Have you gone mad?

How often have I warned you!

RACHEL

Did I ever heed?

ESTHER

By Heaven, no!

RACHEL

Nor will I heed you now.

I like this picture. See how fair it is.

I'll hang it in my room, close by my bed.

At night and in the morning I shall look

And looking, think — well, what you think about

When you have shaken off the weight of clothes

And then feel free of all this heavy load.

Yet, lest they should believe I meant to steal

— For I am rich and have no need of stealing —

You wear my picture there about your neck,

And we shall hang it in the other's place

So he can look at that as I at his

And thus remember me if he forgot me.

Bring me the footstool there; you see I am the queen

And I will pin the king upon this chair.

They say that witches who force men to love

Thrust needles, thus, in images of wax,

And every prick will reach the heart of him

Whom they would charm, to stay or quicken life.

*fastens the picture to the back of the stool with
pins on its four corners*

If only every single prick drew blood,

Then I should drink it down with thirsty lips

And take my pleasure in the harm I wrought.

It hangs before me, beautiful but mute;

But I shall talk to him as would a queen

In this becoming mantle and the crown.

*sits down on the footstool and gazes at the
picture*

You hypocrite, for all your pious airs
 I know your wiles, yes, each and every one.
 The Jewess pleased you, that you must admit!
 And she is fair upon my royal word,
 To be compared, I think, but with myself.

*The king, followed by Garceran and Isaac, has
 entered and placed himself behind the chair
 against the back of which he leans his arms,
 as he watches*

RACHEL
continues

But I will not allow it, I, your queen;
 For I am jealous, sharper than a weasel.
 Your silence only makes your guilt the more.
 Confess! She pleased you? Answer yes!

KING

Well, yes!

*Rachel starts violently, looks at the picture, then
 looks up, recognizes the king and remains
 motionless on the footstool*

KING
steps forward

Why be afraid? You wished me to say yes;
 I did. Take heart, you are in friendly hands.
*as he stretches his hand toward her, she leaps
 from her seat and flees to the door right,
 where she stands with bowed head and
 breathing deeply*

KING

Is she so shy?

ESTHER

Not always, please, my lord.
 Not shy, but quickly frightened.

KING

Am I so fearful?

approaches her

RACHEL
shakes her head violently

KING
 Well then, compose yourself, I pray, dear child.
 I liked you, yes; I say it once again;
 And if this holy war sends me safe home,
 To which my honor summons and my duty,
 Then in Toledo I may ask for you.
 Where do you live?

ISAAC
quickly
 Sire, in the Jewish quarter,
 Ben Mathaes' house.

ESTHER
 If we are not by chance
 Expelled before.

KING
 Thereto I pledge my word!
 Those whom I choose to guard are guarded well.
 And if you are so talkative at home
 And gay of heart as lately with your folk,
 Not shy as now, I'll come and chat a while
 And catch my breath from airless days at court.
 But now depart, it is high time to go.
 You, Garceran, escort them; but you must
 First put my picture back where it belongs.

RACHEL
rushes to the picture pinned to the stool
 Your picture, it is mine.

KING
 Absurd!
 Back whence you took it; put it in its frame.

RACHEL
to Garceran
 Don't touch that picture, nor remove those pins,
 Or I shall fix it with a deeper thrust,

thrusts a pin at the picture
Like this, right through the heart.

KING

Hold off! By Heaven,
You nearly frightened me. Who are you, girl?
Do you use secret arts the law calls crimes?
It seemed as though I felt in my own breast
The thrust aimed at the picture.

ESTHER

Noble Sire,
She is but pampered, an unruly child,
Quite ignorant of all forbidden arts.
She thought of it and did it, that is all.

KING

One should not trifle wantonly like this.
It forced the blood up to my very eyes
And objects round about still seem confused.

to Garceran

Is she not fair?

GARCERAN

She is, my lord and king!

KING

And how that stirs and swells and gleams and glows.
*Rachel has meanwhile removed the picture and
rolled it up*

KING

So you refuse to leave the picture here?

RACHEL

to Esther

I'm taking it.

KING

Then put your faith in God,
He will prevent whatever evil threatens.
Now go in haste. Take, Garceran,
The path that cuts the garden to the rear.
The people are aroused; and weak folk like
To test their weakness on those weaker still.

GARCERAN

at the window

But see, my king, there comes the court in full,
The queen herself leads on her retinue.

KING

This way? O God! Is there no other door?
I loathe the workings of their narrow minds.

GARCERAN

points to the side door

Will this room serve your need?

KING

What do you mean?

Am I to hide myself before my servants?
And yet I fear the pain the queen may feel,
She might believe — what I myself believe.
And so I save my troubled majesty.
See to it that you quickly have her go.
exit into the side room

ESTHER

Did I not say: this way misfortune lies?

*Enter the queen, accompanied by Manrique de
Lara and several others*

QUEEN

I was informed his Majesty is here.

GARCERAN

He was, but he has gone.

QUEEN

And here, the Jewess.

MANRIQUE

Arrayed, like lunacy set loose and free,
In all the tinsel state of puppet plays.
Take off the crown; which is not yours to wear,
Not even as a jest; the mantle, too!

Esther has taken them both off from her
What has she in her hand?

RACHEL

It is my own.

MANRIQUE

That we shall see.

ESTHER

Think not we are so poor

That we should stretch our hands for alien goods.

MANRIQUE

goes toward the side door

Make thorough search within this room to see

If anything be gone; if greed, perhaps.

Has joined itself with impudence, as here.

GARCERAN

bars the way

Here, father, I call: Halt!

MANRIQUE

Do you not know me?

GARCERAN

You and myself. There are, you know, some duties

Which even fathers' rights do not outweigh.

MANRIQUE

Straight look me in the eye. He shifts his glance.

And so of two sons I am robbed this day.

to the queen

Will you not go?

QUEEN

I would, and yet I cannot;

Rather, I can, by Heaven, for I must.

to Garceran

Although your task here ill befits a knight,

I must commend the loyal way you serve.

To see were death — but I can bear and suffer;

And if, ere evening comes, you see your king,

Tell him that to Toledo I have gone — alone!

Exeunt the queen and her attendants

GARCERAN

An evil fate that chose of all the days
This very one to bring me home from war.

RACHEL

to Esther, who is occupied with her
The threat of death would not have made me yield.

ESTHER

to Garceran

But now, we beg of you, take us away.

GARCERAN

First I must ask the king what is his wish.

knocks at the side door

Most gracious Sire! No sign of life! What if
Some mishap? — Come what may, I must go in.

*The king steps out and walks to the front of the
stage, while the others withdraw to the rear*

KING

So honor and the world's repute are not
A level road on which straightforward steps
Decide the course and ends determine worth;
Is it, perhaps, a juggler's tight-stretched rope
On which one misstep plunges from the heights
And any lack of balance calls forth laughter?
Must I, decorum's model yesterday,
Avoid today my servants' every glance?
Then sue no more for favors, fortune's smile!
Yourself determine where your paths should lead.

turns around

What, you still here?

GARCERAN

We wait for orders, Sire.

KING

Would you had always waited for an order
And were still waiting at the far frontier.
Your presence spreads contagion, Garceran.

GARCERAN

Just princes aim to punish every fault,
Their own as well. But, as they are exempt,
Their wrath not rarely falls on other heads.

KING

Not mine. You need not worry, Garceran!
Our friendly feelings for you have not changed.
Yet now take them away, for good and all:
Caprice in others is in princes guilt.

as Rachel approaches him

Enough! But lay aside this picture first,
Return it to the place you took it from.
I wish it. So, make haste.

RACHEL

to Esther

Then you come, too.

as they approach the side door together

My portrait, are you wearing it today?

ESTHER

What do you want?

RACHEL

My way, no matter what.

They disappear through the side door

KING

Await me at the front; I soon will follow.
There we will wash away in Moorish blood
The equal shame that we have shared this day
So we can once more meet the eyes of men.

Rachel and Esther return

RACHEL

It has been done.

KING

Away, without farewell.

ESTHER

Receive, O Sire, the thanks we give.

RACHEL

Not mine.

KING

Give no thanks, then.

RACHEL

I will, but later on.

KING

Not later, never!

RACHEL

I know better.

to Esther

Come!

*They go, accompanied by Garceran and followed
by old Isaac, bowing obsequiously*

KING

High time for her to go; to tell the truth,
The heavy tedium of our life at court
Makes something that will lighten it a need.
And yet this girl, though she has beauty, charm,
Seems overbold and violent at heart;
A wise man then, and prudent, will take care —
Alonso!

Enter a servant

SERVANT

Gracious Sire —

KING

Prepare our mounts.

SERVANT

Sire, to Toledo?

KING

To Alarcos, boy.

We start for the frontier, we go to war;
Make ready only what we need the most.

Four threatening eyes await me in Toledo:
Two full of tears, two others full of fire.

She fought to keep my picture in her hands,
 Defying firmly even death itself.
 But then I spoke a word of stern command
 And back it went to where it hung before.
 An artful bit of acting, nothing else.
 I wonder if she fixed it in its frame?
 Since, when I go, I leave this place for long,
 Let all be as it was and undisturbed
 And every trace of this affair wiped out.

*goes into the side room. A pause during which
 the servant takes up from the chair the
 clothes which Rachel has taken off and
 hangs them over his arm, keeping the crown*

*The King returns, holding in his hand Rachel's
 picture*

KING

My picture gone and this one in its place —
 It is her own. It seems to burn my hand.

hurls the picture to the floor

Away with you! Can pertness go thus far?
 That must not be! For while I think of her
 With just abhorrence, this, her painted likeness,
 Makes flame the embers glowing in my breast.
 To think she holds my picture in her hands!
 They talk of magic and forbidden arts
 This folk employs with symbols such as this,
 And something as of magic chills my flesh.

to the servant

Here, pick this up and straightway hurry on
 Until you overtake them.

SERVANT

Whom, Sire?

KING

Whom?

Why, Garceran, of course, and those two with him.
 Return this to the girls and then demand —

SERVANT

What, noble Sire?

KING

Shall I make my own servants
My confidants to share with me my shame?
I will myself force the exchange, if need be.
Well, pick it up! — I will not touch the thing.

The servant has picked up the picture

KING

How clumsy, boy! Now put it in your bosom;
But there a stranger's warmth would keep it warm!
Here! I myself will take it. Come with me;
We must catch up with them.

On second thought,

Now that distrust is rife, some mischief might
Befall them, yes, an act of violence.
No other escort serves as well as I.
You, follow me!

looks at the picture and then puts it in his bosom

Is not that castle there

Retiro, where my forbear once, Don Sancho,
Hid with a Moorish girl from all the world —

SERVANT

It is, illustrious Sire.

KING

But we will copy
Our forbears in their bravery, their worth,
Not in their weakness when they basely fall.
A man's first task is conquest of himself —
Then let him face all foreign conquerors.

Retiro is its name? — What was my plan?
Oh yes, to leave! And seal your lips! Of course,
You do not know. So much the better. Come!

exit with the servant

The curtain falls.

ACT III

Garden of the royal country seat, the Castle Retiro. At the rear flows the river Tagus. Toward the front, right, a roomy arbor.

To the left, several petitioners in a row, with petitions in their hands; Isuac stands near them

ISAAC

You have been told no one must loiter here.
For here my daughter soon will take her airing,
And he with her, yes he; I say not who.
So tremble and begone! And your requests
Take to the king's advisors in Toledo.
takes the petition of one of them
Let's see! — Rejected, go!

PETITIONER

You held it wrong.

ISAAC

Because the whole request is also wrong,
And so are you. You cause disturbance, go.

SECOND PETITIONER

Oh, Isaac, sir, you know me from Toledo.

ISAAC

I know you not. In recent days I find
My eyes have both become a trifle weak.

SECOND PETITIONER

Well, I know you, however; and this purse,
The one you lost, I here restore to you.

ISAAC

The purse I lost? It is the very one,
Of good green silk, had ten piastres in it.

SECOND PETITIONER

Nay, twenty.

ISAAC

Twenty? Well, my eye is good;
It is my memory that grows weak at times.
This paper, I suppose, gives your account
In full, of what you found and where and how.
And this report you have for higher quarters
Is not now needed; give it here to me,
That I may file it in its proper place
And odor of your honesty may rise.

*The petitioners hold out their petitions; he takes
one in each hand and flings them to the
ground*

No matter what it is, here is your answer.

to a third

You wear a ring upon your finger here,
The stone is good. Let's see!

The petitioner gives him the ring

This flaw, of course,
Destroys its lustre; here, you take it back.
puts the ring on his own finger

THIRD PETITIONER

But you have put it on your hand.

ISAAC

On mine?

Why, so I have! I thought I gave it you.
The ring sits tight. Why should I maim myself?

THIRD PETITIONER

Keep it; but, please, take my petition also.

ISAAC

busies himself with the ring
I keep them both in memory of you.

The king shall weigh the ring; that is, your words,
 Though your petition has a serious flaw,
 I mean, of course, the stone — you understand.
 Now all of you, be gone! Have I no club?
 Must I be bothered with this Christian rabble?

Garceran has meanwhile entered

GAR CERAN

Good luck! You sit among the reeds and pitch
 The pipes you cut, I think, a bit too high.

ISAAC

My task it is to keep intruders out.
 The king is not here, says he is not here.
 Whoso disturbs him — you too, Garceran,
 I must bid you begone. I have no choice.

GAR CERAN

You asked not long ago to have a club.
 When you have found one, bring it here. It would,
 It seems, befit your back more than your hand.

ISAAC

Now you flare up. All Christians are the same,
 Direct and frank, outspoken. But cleverness
 And caution, supple patience, these they lack.
 The king enjoys the talks he has with me.

GAR CERAN

It needs a bore to furnish entertainment
 When boredom takes to flight before itself.

ISAAC

We talk affairs of state and of exchange.

GAR CERAN

The new decree derives from you, perhaps,
 Which makes a threepence worth but twopence now?

ISAAC

Friend, money lurks behind all things we do.
 The enemy approaches, you buy arms;
 The soldier serves for pay and pay is money;
 You eat, you drink up money; what you eat

Is bought and bought with money, nothing else.
 The time will come when each man is a draft,
 And one, my friend, made payable at sight.
 I am the king's advisor. Should you care
 Yourself to join your cause with Isaac's fortune —

GARCERAN

To join my cause with yours? It is my curse
 That chance and damnable appearances
 Entangled me in folly's foul concerns
 Which harshly test both duty and my oath.

ISAAC

My Rachel mounts in favor day by day.

GARCERAN

Oh, why could not this king have spent his youth,
 The thoughtless turbulence of boyhood years,
 In play and trifling much as others do?
 With only men about him as a child,
 Cared for, brought on to man's estate by men,
 Sustained before his time on wisdom's fruit,
 His marriage even treated as a deal,
 He, for the first time, chances on a woman,
 A female being, nothing but her sex,
 Who venges folly on the child of wisdom.
 Good women are in part, or wholly, men;
 It is their faults that turn them into women.
 In his case even opposition fails
 Which bitter knowledge gives those oft deceived:
 The wanton game becomes a serious thing.

But this shall not last long, I pledge my word.
 The foe is at our borders and the king
 Must head his troops; I come to lead him there,
 Then your mirage will be reduced to nought.

ISAAC

See if you can succeed. You must be with us,
 Or else against us. You will break your neck
 If you attempt to clear the wide abyss.

The sound of flutes is heard

Hear that? With cymbals and with trumpets they approach.
As Ahasuerus came, the king, with Esther,
Who raised our folk to glory and to fame.

GARCERAN

Must I see mirrored in this wanton king
My image as I was in former days,
Shamed for myself in him, for him in me?

*A boat with the king, Rachel and attendants on
board appears on the river and comes along-
side*

KING

Make fast! Here is the landing, here the arbor.

RACHEL

The boat is rocking; stop, or I shall fall.

The king has leapt ashore

And here upon this board that swings and sways
Am I to come ashore?

KING

Here, take my hand.

RACHEL

No, no! I'm giddy!

GARCERAN

aside

Giddy? Aye, very true.

KING

helps her ashore

Now it is done, the superhuman task.

RACHEL

No, never will I board a boat again.

seizes the king's arm

Allow me, dear my lord! I am so weak
And feel my heart, it pounds as though in fever.

KING

Fear is a woman's right, which you abuse.

RACHEL

And now, hard hearted, you deny me your support;
 Besides, this garden's paths are nowhere strewn
 With sand, but rudely with the sharpest stones
 For men to stamp on, not for women's steps.

KING

Lay her a carpet, then; let us have peace.

RACHEL

I feel that I am nothing but a burden.
 Oh, if my sister only could be here!
 For I am ill and weary unto death.
 No other cushions here?

throws the cushions in the arbor violently about

No, no, no, no!

KING

The weariness has luckily grown less.

catches sight of Garceran

Ah, Garceran, see what a child she is.

GARCERAN

A pampered one, it seems.

KING

So are they all.

It suits her well.

GARCERAN

Depending on one's taste.

KING

Look, Garceran, I realize my wrong;
 But I know also that a simple nod,
 One word suffices wholly to dissolve
 This dream play to the nothingness it is.
 And so I bear it since it is a need
 Amid the troubles my own guilt has caused.
 How does the army?

GARCERAN

As you long have known,

The enemy prepares.

KING

And so shall we.

A day or two to finish with this trifling,
To banish it, forgotten, from my heart
Forever, then comes time and with it counsel.

GARCERAN

The counsel, yes, perhaps; but time will fly.

KING

We shall catch up with time by deeds we do.

RACHEL

They talk now and, alas, I know of what:
Of blood, of war, wild battles with the Moors,
And that man there is making plots against me
And lures his master to the field, far off,
To free a path to reach me for my foes.

And yet, Don Garceran, I like you well;
You know what treatment pleases gentle ladies;
They praise your bold attack when you pay suit,
Your daring exploits in the courts of love.
You are not like your master, who, the king,
Even when love meets love's embrace, is rude;
Who soon repents each kindly word he speaks;
And whose affection is a hidden hate.
Come here and sit by me! I want to speak,
Not mope alone amid this noisy crowd.
You will not come. Of course, they hold you back.

weeps

They grudge me every comfort, every joy,
And keep me like a slave shut up alone.
If only I were home in Father's house,
Where all was at my service, at my wish,
While here I am rejected and despised.

KING

Go sit by her!

GARCERAN

You bid me?

KING

Go on, go!

RACHEL

Sit here by me! No, nearer, nearer; thus!
 Once more I say I like you, Garceran.
 You are a perfect knight in very fact,
 Not in name only as they learned to be,
 Those proud Castilians, iron hard and cold,
 Taught by their foes, the hostile Moorish folk.
 But what these others do with grace and skill,
 Expressing qualities they have from birth,
 Those crudely imitate and stay uncouth.
 Give me your hand; but see how soft it is,
 And yet you wear a sword no less than they.
 You are at ease, though, in a lady's chamber
 And know good manners, what is said and done.
 Is not this ring a gift of Doña Clara,
 One all too pale to live with pink-cheeked love,
 Were not the color lacking in her face
 Supplied by endless waves of blushing shame.
 But here I see you wear still other rings;
 How many sweethearts have you? Well? — Confess.

GARCERAN

What if I made of you the same demand?

RACHEL

I never yet have loved. But I could love
 If I should meet the madness in some breast
 That would fill mine, had once my heart been stirred.
 Till then I follow customs like the rest,
 Traditional in love's idolatry,
 As in a foreign temple one would kneel.

KING

*has meanwhile been pacing back and forth from
 the front to the rear of the stage; he now
 turns to one of the servants at the front,
 left, and addresses him in an undertone*

Go get my arms, a coat of mail complete;

With them await me near the garden-house.
I leave for camp where I can be of help.

Exit the servant

RACHEL

Look at your king! He thinks he is in love,
Yet when I speak to you or press your hand,
He does not trouble; like a business man
He rounds out crowded, noisy hours with work,
Content if night but close the day's account.
Be gone! You are like him, like all the others too.
Would that my sister came! She is cool-headed,
Is wiser far than I; but if the spark
Of purpose and resolve falls in her breast,
She blazes forth like me in towering flames.
Were she a man, she would be strong; you all
Would be submissive to her dauntless eye;
But I will sleep meantime until she comes;
Myself a dream but of a single night.

lays her head nestling in her arm on the cushion

GARCERAN

*steps up to the king, who has stopped pacing
back and forth and now regards Rachel as
she rests*

Your Majesty!

KING

his eyes still fixed on Rachel

What say you?

GARCERAN

If you please,

I shall return to camp to join the troops.

KING

as above

The troops have left the camp you say; but why?

GARCERAN

You did not hear me. I would go to camp.

KING

And there tell stories, state opinions, gossip?

GARCERAN

Of what?

KING

Of me, of what has happened here.

GARCERAN

For that I first would have to understand.

KING

Ah! — You believe in miracles?

GARCERAN

Almost.

Of late, sir, yes.

KING

Why only, friend, of late?

GARCERAN

We mostly love alone what we respect,
But love what we despise, my royal master —

KING

Despise is, I should say, too harsh a word;
Disdain, perhaps, but still miraculous.

GARCERAN

The miracle has grown a little old
And first was worked that day in paradise
When God created Eve from Adam's rib.

KING

But after it was done, he closed the breast
And at the entrance placed the will on guard.
Rejoin the troops; but not alone, with me.

RACHEL

sits up

The sun has stolen in to my retreat,
Who will support that curtain on the side?

looks off-stage to the right

There go two men, who carry heavy weapons;
The lance would serve my purpose very well.

calls into the wings

Come here! This way! do you not hear? Make haste!

*Enter the servant, returning with the king's
helmet and lance, accompanied by a sec-
ond servant bearing the king's shield and
cuirass*

RACHEL

Here with your lance, good man, and thrust its point
Deep down into the earth that it will keep
The roof supported on the sunny side
And make the shadow broader which it casts.
— Do as I say! — Enough! — That other man,
He takes his house along as does the snail,
If not, more like, a house for someone else.
— Hold up the shield! — A mirror, as I live!
Crude, yes, like all else here, but it will serve.

The shield is held out before her

One can arrange one's hair, put back a curl
That carelessly has ventured too far out,
Rejoicing God so made us as to please.
This bulging shield distorts. May Heaven help!
What puffed-up cheeks are these. No thanks, my friend;
We want no fullness other than our own.
— The helmet next! Ill-suited to make war,
Concealing what most often wins, the eyes,
But made expressly for the strife of love.
Now put the helmet on my head? — You hurt me! —
In case one's love rebels and stands on pride,
The visor down!

lets the visor down

And he stands in the dark.

But should he plan, perhaps, to go away,
Send for his arms, to leave us here alone,
Then up the visor goes.

lifts the visor

Let there be light!

The sun will conquer, scattering all the mists.

KING

goes toward her

You silly, playful, wise, yet foolish child.

RACHEL

Stand back!—Give me the shield! Give me the lance!
They come on me with force. I shall fight back.

KING

Lay down your arms! No harm will touch you here.
takes both her hands

Enter Esther from the rear, left

RACHEL

Ah, you, my little sister! Welcome here!
Off with this masquerade! Be quick! Be quick!
The helmet, not my head. What louts you are!

runs to greet her

Now welcome once again, dear sister mine.
How I have longed to have you at my side!
I hope you bring the bracelet and my clasps,
The balms and scents Toledo has for sale
And which I ordered there and had reserved?

ESTHER

I bring them but with other, graver things:
With evil news, an unbecoming jewel.

Illustrious lord and prince! Her Majesty,
The queen, has quit Toledo's walls to seek
The pleasure palace where it was we first,
To our misfortune, Sire, laid eyes upon you.

to Garceran

Together with her went your noble father,
Manrique Lara, who by open letters
To each had summoned all the realm's grandees
To join in counsel for the common good
As though the kingdom were without a head
And you had died, who are its lord and king.

KING

You must be dreaming.

ESTHER

Sire, I wake and watch,
And must keep watch to keep my sister safe,
Whom they now threaten and will make their victim.

RACHEL

God help me now! Have I not begged you long
To go away from here, Sire, back to court
And there break up my enemies' designs?
But you remained. And see, here are your weapons;
The helmet, shield and here is your great spear.
Shall I collect them?—No, I am too weak.

KING

to Esther

Care for that foolish creature who ten times
Can contradict herself with every breath.
I shall appear at court; I need no arms;
With open breast and with defenseless hands
I there shall step within my subjects' midst
And ask: What rebel dares to lift a voice?
They are to know their king still lives these days
And though the sun may set when evening comes,
The morning brings to life its brilliant rays.
Come, Garceran!

GARCERAN

You find me ready, Sire.

ESTHER

But what, Sire, is our fate?

RACHEL

Oh stay, please stay!

KING

The castle is secure, the keeper true,
He will protect you with his very life.
For though I feel that I in much have erred,
I would have no one suffer who, relying
On my protection, shared my guilt and error.
Come, Garceran! Or rather, lead the way;
For if I found those nobles still assembled,

Uncalled by me, by me unauthorized,
 I thén must punish, though against my will.
 And so, bid them disperse, and quickly too,
 And to your father say: Though he was guard
 And ruler for me when I was a lad,
 I now know how to guard my rights myself
 Against him, and against them all combined.
 Now come! And you, farewell!

RACHEL
approaches him

Illustrious Sire!

KING

Have done! I need my strength and steadfast will
 And would not weaken them with fond farewells.
 When I have done my duty, news will come;
 How I will act and what the future holds
 Are wrapped in darkness still, and night. I pledge
 My word to guard and shield you, come what may.
 Come, Garceran! God be with us and you.

Exeunt the king and Garceran, to the left

RACHEL

He does not love me, I have known it long.

ESTHER

Oh sister, useless is that tardy knowing
 That comes when harm has taught us what to know.
 I warned you; you would never give me heed.

RACHEL

He was so hot and ardent at the start.

ESTHER

And now he coolly evens out his haste.

RACHEL

But what will come of me who trusted him?
 Let us escape!

ESTHER

The streets are full of men,
 And all the country rises up against us.

RACHEL

And I am then to die and am still young,
 And want so much to live. Well, not to live;
 No, to be dead, unwarned and unprepared.
 The instant we are dying only shakes us.

her arms about Esther's neck

I am unhappy, sister, past all hope!

after a pause, her voice broken by sobs

And has the necklace amethysts, for sure,
 The one you brought?

ESTHER

It has. And also pearls
 As glowing as your tears and just as many.

RACHEL

I do not care to see it. Later, maybe,
 If our arrest endures too long a time
 And endless tedium calls for some diversion,
 I'll put it on and deck myself for death.
 Look, who draws near! Ha-ha, ha-ha! If that
 Is not our father, and armed from top to toe.

*Enter Isaac from the left, a helmet on his head
 and wearing a cuirass under his gabardine*

ISAAC

Yes, I, the father of a wayward brood
 Who bring me to the grave before my time.
 In armor, yes. Is murder not afoot?
 Will flesh alone turn off a dagger's thrust?
 An unexpected blow can split your skull.
 What's more, the cuirass hides my drafts and bills.
 Its pockets hold the gold that I have saved,
 That I shall bury, keeping soul and body
 From poverty and death. And if you mock,
 My curse on you will be that patriarch's,
 Named Isaac, too, like me; you with the voice
 Of pious Jacob but with Esau's hands,

Though here reversed, my first-born stays the first ;
 My care shall be myself. Our ways have parted !
 But hark !

RACHEL

What noise ?

ESTHER

The drawbridge has been raised.

RACHEL

Proof that the king has passed the castle gates.
 He hurries off ! Will he come back again ?
 I fear me : No ! I have the worst to fear.

her head sinks on Esther's breast

And yet I loved him, sister, with real love.

The curtain falls.

ACT IV

Large hall with a throne in the foreground, right.

Next to the throne and running in line with it to the left, several chairs upon which eight or ten Castilian nobles are sitting. Nearest to the throne, Manrique de Lara, who has arisen

MANRIQUE

And so we then are gathered here in sorrow,
Not many, only those for whom the time,
Short as it was, the fact too that their homes
Were near, made prompt attendance possible.
And others, not a few will join our ranks;
But even so we must take action now,
Forced by the pressing, by the general need
Which will not brook postponement. Missing here,
Above all in our solemn group, is he
In whom the right is vested to preside,
But also even to convene this council,
So that we are half lawless at the start.
And hence, my noble lords, I took good care
To ask her royal majesty, our queen,
So deeply is our matter her concern,
To take the seat that is her right among us
So we may know we are not masterless,
Nor contumaciously have here convened.

The matter for our council on this day
 Is, as I hope and fear, now known to all.
 It happens that the king, that our great ruler,
 Great not through station, rank or easte alone,
 No, but through gifts so that, when we glance back
 To scan the open book of bygone times,
 We scarcely look upon his like again,
 Except that strength, the power behind all good,
 Once it begins to stray from proper paths,
 Sets evil moving with an equal force —
 It happens that the king has left the court,
 Lured by a woman's wantonness of heart,
 A matter no way meet for us to judge. —
 — The queen!

*The queen, accompanied by several ladies, enters
 from the right. After she has indicated by
 a movement of her hand that the nobles,
 who have arisen, are to resume their seats,
 she mounts the throne*

MANRIQUE

Do you permit, Your Majesty?

QUEEN

softly

Proceed.

MANRIQUE

Let me repeat the words I used:
 A matter no way meet for us to judge.
 But now the Moor is arming at our borders
 And threatens war against our hard-pressed land;
 It is the right and duty of the king,
 With forces he enlists and calls to arms,
 To offer opposition to this peril.
 The king, though, is not here. But he will come,
 I know. If only since he is enraged
 At our assembling here of our own will.

But if the cause remains that led him off,
 Then he will enter those old bonds anew
 And we again be orphaned as before.
 Your Majesty?

The queen nods permission

But first the girl must go.

Proposals have been made of various kinds.
 One group would try to buy her off with gold,
 Another send her from the realm in chains
 To some safe prison in far distant lands.
 But gold the king has, too; and though far off,
 Might never fails to find the thing it seeks.
 A third proposal —

As the queen has arisen

Please, Your Majesty.

You are too gentle for our bitter task.
 Your very kindness, which no firm resolve
 Renewed from time to time and fortified,
 Has more than all, perhaps, estranged our king.
 I find no fault, I merely state the fact.
 You may, therefore, forgo your own opinion.
 Yet, would you have your say, I beg you, speak.
 What flowery fate, what flattering punishment
 Seems fitting for our monarch's paramour?

QUEEN

softly

Death.

MANRIQUE

In truth?

QUEEN

more firmly

Death.

MANRIQUE

You hear the word, my lords.

That was the third proposal which before,
 Although a man, I did not dare pronounce.

QUEEN

Is wedlock not the holiest estate
 Since it exalts as right things else forbidden,
 And what each normal person feels a horror
 It takes within the realm of pious duty?
 The other laws the highest God ordained
 Serve but to make a good man's impulse strong;
 But what is strong enough to hallow sin
 Must be more binding than the Ten Commandments.
 This woman now has sinned against that law.
 However, if my husband's guilt endures,
 Then I myself throughout the years now past
 Have lived with him in sin, not as his wife;
 And then our son was wrongly born, an outcast,
 A shame unto himself, disgrace to us.
 If you find guilt in me, then punish me:
 I will not live, if I am soiled with sin.
 Then let him from the princesses around
 Select a wife, since only what he wants,
 Not what is right, will satisfy his heart.
 But if it be this woman taints our earth,
 Then cleanse your king of taint, his land of blight.
 I am ashamed that men must hear me speak,
 And things scarce proper, too; but need compels.

MANRIQUE

But will the king submit to this, and how?

QUEEN

Oh, yes; because he ought, and therefore must.
 He can take vengeance also on her slayers;
 His first blow fall on me and pierce my breast.

resumes her seat

MANRIQUE

There is no other way, I must avow.
 There die in war the noblest men we have
 And by a death more terrible, more cruel:
 Grown faint with thirst or under horses' hoofs,
 With every pain made double, more acute,

Than does the convict on the gallows-tree;
 Then sickness daily carries off the best,
 God is no niggard with his creatures' lives;
 Why, then, should we be timid where His word,
 The sacred laws that He himself proclaimed,
 Demand the death of him who has transgressed?
 We will, in full accord, approach the king,
 Beg him to put the obstacle away
 Which keeps him far from us, us far from him.
 If he refuse, the laws of war shall rule
 Until our king and laws again are one,
 And we by serving one can serve them both.

Enter a servant

SERVANT

Don Garceran.

MANRIQUE

And does this traitor dare?

Tell him —

SERVANT

On orders from His Majesty.

MANRIQUE

That changes all. Were he my deadly foe,
 He has my ear, if his words are the king's.

Enter Garceran

MANRIQUE

Tell us your message, then be off: God speed.

GARCERAN

Your Majesty, the queen, and you, my father,
 And you beside, the noblest of the land,
 I am convinced today as ne'er before
 That to be trusted is man's greatest wealth,
 While levity, though conscious of no wrong,
 Can more than any wrong destroy and harm;
 For one mistake the world may overlook,
 But levity makes people fear them all.

And so today, though I feel cleansed of guilt,
I stand before you, in your eyes besmirched,
Atoning for my heedlessness in youth.

MANRIQUE

Of that another time; your message now.

GARCERAN

Through me the king dissolves this parliament.

MANRIQUE

And did he give, when he sent levity,
Him nothing tangible to take as proof,
No written word, at least, from his own hand?

GARCERAN

He follows close behind.

MANRIQUE

That is enough.

And therefore, in his royal name, I here
Dissolve this parliament. You are dismissed.
But if you heed my wishes and advice,
Do not as yet return to your estates,
But rather tarry close, one here, one there,
To see if Don Alfonso acts for us,
Or we must do what duty bids, for him.

to Garceran

But you who are so skilled in serving princes,
If you, perhaps, were also sent to spy,
Be sure to tell your king what I advised,
That the estates, in fact, have been dissolved,
But also are prepared to join for action.

GARCERAN

Once more then, face to face with all, I here
Disclaim all guilt for these confused affairs.
As chance alone had brought me from the front,
So it was chance the king selected me
To guard the girl against the people's rage;
And every warning, argument and reason
A man can think of to prevent a wrong
I urged; though all, indeed, without result.

Despise me, if you find my words untrue.
 And Doña Clara, you my destined bride,
 As both our fathers wish and I as well,
 There is no need to hide your noble head.
 In truth not worthy of you — was I ever? —
 But no less worthy now than any time,
 I stand before you and I swear: 'Tis so.

MANRIQUE

If it is so, and you are still a man,
 Be a Castilian, take your place among us
 And with us make your country's cause your own.
 You are well known to those who guard Retiro,
 The captain, if you ask, will let you in.
 Perhaps we shall have need of such an entry
 So be the king, our noble liege, prove deaf.

GARCERAN

No word or act against my lord, my king.

MANRIQUE

The choice is yours! For now, join with these others;
 The future may prove brighter than we think.

Enter servant from the left

SERVANT

His Majesty, the king!

MANRIQUE

points to the centre door and addresses the Es-
tates

Quick, this way out!

to the servants

And you put back the chairs against the wall.
 Let naught remind him of our meeting here.

QUEEN

who has stepped down from the throne
 My knees give way; and no one lends me aid!

MANRIQUE

Strength and decorum formerly were one,
 Of late their pact of friendship is undone,

Strength stayed with you, as always was its way,
 Decorum fled to those grown old and gray.
 Pray take my arm. My step may prove unsure!
 Though strength has fled, decorum stayed secure.

*leads the queen off to the right. The Estates
 with Garceran have gone out through the
 centre door*

*Enter the king from the left, behind him his
 page*

KING

The bay is lame, you said? I rode him hard;
 Well, for the time I do not need him more.
 See he is led, unmounted, to Toledo,
 Where rest will soon restore him, best of cures.
 I will myself beside my royal consort
 And in her coach appear before the people
 So they believe what their own eyes have seen:
 That discord and dissension are now past.

Exit the page

I am alone. Does no one come to meet me?
 Mere staring walls and silent furnishings.
 They must have met here not so long ago.
 Oh, but these empty chairs speak out more loudly
 Than ever those who sat on them have done.
 What good is served by pondering and brooding,
 I have to make amends; then I'll begin.
 Here is the entry to my wife's apartment,
 Let me then tread this most unwelcome path.

approaches the side door, right

How now, the door is barred? Hallo, within!
 It is the king, the master in this house,
 For me there can be here no locks, no doors.

A lady in waiting opens the door and steps out

KING

Why this blockade?

LADY IN WAITING

The queen, Your Majesty —

As the king shows himself determined to enter
The inner door she also locked herself.

KING

I will not force my way. Inform her then
I have returned and now demand her presence —
Or rather say, as I have said: request.

Exit the lady in waiting

KING

stands opposite the throne

Thou lofty seat, raised high above all others,
Grant that we never sink beneath thy plane,
But not dependent on those steps of thine
Maintain the standard of the great and good.

Enter the queen

KING

goes toward her with outstretched hands

Lenore, I salute you!

QUEEN

You are welcome!

KING

And not your hand?

QUEEN

To see you gives me joy.

KING

And not your hand?

QUEEN

bursts into tears

O God, our Father!

KING

Lenore, mine is not a leper's hand.
I go to battle, as I ought and must,
And foemen's blood will cover it completely;
Clear water, though, can wash away the stain,
And when you welcome me, it will be clean.

The water now of these material things
 Has for our souls its spirit counterpart.
 You as a Christian are so strong in faith
 You think repentance can effect such change.
 We others, counting less on words than deeds,
 Do not incline to such a modest cure
 Which takes the guilt away but not the harm,
 Yes, is in part, but fear of new mistakes.
 But if good resolutions, cheerfully assumed,
 Are guarantees for now and time to come,
 Take what I freely give, and give complete.

QUEEN

holds out both her hands

God knows how gladly!

KING

No, not both your hands.

The right alone, though farther from the heart,
 We give to seal alliances and treaties,
 Perhaps to hint that not alone emotion
 That has its seat established in the heart
 But also reason, all that man desires,
 Must give validity to what we pledged;
 For man's emotions change with changing time,
 But what his mind has weighed, remains in force.

QUEEN

offers him her right hand

That too! All of myself.

KING

Your hand, it trembles.

releases her hand

I have no thought to treat you ill, my dear.
 And do not think because I speak less mildly,
 I therefore know less well how great my fault
 Nor honor less the kindness which is yours.

QUEEN

One can condone, to understand is harder.
 How could it happen! That I cannot grasp.

KING

Until not long ago we lived as children.
 As such they married us upon a time,
 And we, we both lived on as docile children;
 But children must grow up, increase in years,
 And each new stage they enter as they grow
 By some discomfort makes its presence known:
 Most commonly some sickness that reveals
 We are the same and yet are also changed;
 And change is fitting in what stays the same.
 And so it is with heart and mind as well:
 They too expand, and in a wider orbit
 Turn round about their former central point.
 Such is the sickness we have undergone;
 When I say: we, I mean that you yourself
 Are not incapable of inner growth.
 Let us not dully fail to hear this warning!
 We will henceforward live like royal folk,
 For we are that, no less; nor bar to us
 The world and what of great it has and good;
 And like the bees who with their treasured load,
 When evening comes, wing homeward to their hive,
 Enriched by gains their busy day has brought,
 So we shall find each other at our hearth,
 Now doubly sweet since it a while lacked warmth.

QUEEN

If you desire; to me there is no loss.

KING

It will seem loss to you in recollection,
 Once you have that by which one measures worth.
 But now let us forget what went before!
 I deem it wrong in striking out anew
 To clutter up the path with odds and ends,
 The rubbish from the storehouse of the past.
 I here absolve myself from all my sins,
 You in your purity have no such need.

QUEEN

Not so! Not so! Did you but know, my husband,
What sort of thoughts, calamitous and black,
Have found their way within my fearful heart.

KING

Perhaps of vengeance, yes? So much the better,
For then you feel forgiveness is man's duty
And that no one is safe, no, not the best.
We will not look for vengeance, will not punish;
For that one, take my word, is free of guilt,
As is vulgarity, as is mere weakness
That offers no resistance and submits.
The guilt is wholly mine, and mine alone.

QUEEN

Oh, let me think what keeps and comforts me.
The Moorish folk and all who are their like,
They practice secret, yes, nefarious arts,
With pictures, symbols, spells and evil potions
Which in his breast pervert a person's heart
And make his will submissive to their own.

KING

We are encompassed round by conjured works
And yet we are the conjurers ourselves.
What is far off, a thought can summon close;
What we despise, we later learn to love,
And in a world where miracles abound,
We are the greatest miracle ourselves.

QUEEN

She has your picture.

KING

She must give it back;
And I will fasten it where all can see
And write beneath it for my late descendants:
A king, not all too evil in himself,
Forgot his office and the path of duty.
Thanks be to God, he found himself again.

QUEEN

But you yourself are wearing round your neck —

KING

Her picture? That you also learned so soon?

takes the picture with its chain from his neck

and lays it on the table at the front, right

Then I shall lay it down, and may it lie there,

A bolt not harmful once the thunder sounds.

The girl herself, she shall be sent away!

Then let her with some man of her own people —

paces back and forth from the front to the rear

of the stage, now and then stopping short

But no, not that! — The women of her race

Can please, are even good. — Not so their men

With filthy hands and niggard greed of gain;

None such shall lay his finger on the girl.

For after all she was in better hands. —

Why should that trouble us! — This way or that,

If near, if far! — All this is their concern.

QUEEN

But will you keep this strength too, Don Alfonso?

KING

stops short

But see, you never knew the girl at all.

Take all the faults that dwell on this broad earth,

Like folly and like vanity, like weakness,

Yes, guile, defiance, coquetry and greed,

Put these together, then you have this woman.

And if you call it puzzling and not magic

That she attracted me, I will agree;

And would feel shame, were it not natural too.

paces up and down

QUEEN

Oh no, not natural, surely not, my husband.

KING

stops short

One magic thing there is. We call it habit,
 Not dominant at first, it then holds fast;
 From things distasteful, hateful at the start,
 It strips each trace that seemed unwelcome once,
 Makes of repeated acts an urgent need.
 This chain I wore — and which, cast off, now lies
 Removed forever — breast and neck alike
 Had grown accustomed to its weight and presence,

shakes himself

And chills pass through those empty spaces now.
 I must make haste to choose another chain,
 The body's note of warning is not jest.
 And now an end!

But that you ever thought
 To venge yourself in blood on this poor fool —
 That was not well.

steps to the table

But only see these eyes —
 Not eyes, indeed, — her body, throat and form,
 Those God created with a master hand;
 It was herself that later marred the lines.
 Let us revere in her the hand of God
 And not destroy what he in wisdom formed.

QUEEN

No, touch it not!

KING

This senseless talk again!

And if I really take it in my hand,

lays the picture on his hand

Am I another, then? I twine the chain
 In jest, to mock you, thus about my throat.

does it

Concealing next my breast the foe you fear,
 Am I then less Alfonso, he who sees

That he has erred and who condemns his fault?
No more such nonsense, we have had enough.

draws away from the table

QUEEN

I only —

KING

looks at her wildly

What, again?

QUEEN

God help me!

KING

Be not afraid, my wife. But use your reason;
And do not say the selfsame thing again:
It tells me in the end how you two differ.

points first to the table, then to his breast

The young girl there — of course, she now is here —
Though she was foolish, made no other claim
And did not pose as wise, or good and modest.
It is the way that virtuous women have,
That they would make their virtue your reward.
If you are sad, they comfort you with virtue,
And if your mood is gay, again comes virtue
Which finally drives gaiety away
And points out sin as your unique salvation.
What we call virtue is a group of virtues,
Unlike, diverse, as time and state demand,
And not a hollow idol, without a fault
But just for that without all merit too.
Yes, I will take this chain from round my throat,
For it recalls to mind —

And then, Lenore,

That you have made our vassals your allies,
That was not good; was foolish, tactless.
If you are wroth with me, that is your right;
But these men, they, my subjects and dependents,
What do they want? Am I a child, a lad,
Who not yet knows the compass of his station?

Concern for state affairs they share with me
 And duty binds me to a like concern.
 But I, Alfonso, not the king, the man
 Within my house, in my own life and person,
 Do I owe an accounting to dependents?
 Not so! And did I heed my wrath alone,
 I should in haste return from whence I came
 If but to show that neither to their judgment
 Nor their consent must I subject myself.

steps forward and stamps his foot on the floor

And, finally, this graybeard, Don Manrique,
 If he was once my guardian, is he still?

Don Manrique appears at the centre door. The queen, wringing her hands, points to the king. Manrique, making a reassuring gesture with both hands, withdraws

KING

Does he make bold to dictate to his king
 The homespun precepts of his wise old age,
 And even venture secret, brazen action — ?
paces up and down, diagonally across the stage
 I will investigate it, I, the judge;
 And if the merest trace of wrong appear,
 Of criminal intention, or an act,
 The closer is the guilty one, yes, closest,
 The harder will he pay for his presumption.

Not you, Lenore, no, you have been pardoned.

During the preceding, the queen has quietly withdrawn through the side door, right

Where did she go? Am I left here alone?

Am I made out a fool in my own house?

approaches the side door, right

I'll follow her! — The door is locked?

bursts the door open with a kick

No more!

Thus home and happiness I take by storm!

goes in

*Don Manrique and Garceran appear at the
centre door. The latter takes a step across
the threshold*

MANRIQUE

Will you come too?

GARCERAN

My father!

MANRIQUE

Will you not?

The rest precede. You'll follow?

GARCERAN

I will follow.

They withdraw, the door closing behind them

Pause

The king returns and stands as though listening

KING

Hark once again! — No, nothing; all is still —

My consort's chambers void of life, forsaken.

But on returning, from the turret room,

I heard the noise of wheels and horses' hoofs

In rushing gallop hurrying away.

Am I alone? Ho, Garceran! Ramiro!

Enter a page from the side door, left

KING

What news? And what goes on?

PAGE

Illustrious Sire,

The castle is deserted; you and I

The only living beings in its walls.

KING

The queen?

PAGE

By coach departed from the castle.

KING

Back to Toledo then?

PAGE

I do not know.

I do know that the men —

KING

What men?

PAGE

The Estates,

Who one and all leaped quickly on their mounts,
 Did not go by the main road to Toledo,
 But rather took the way you came yourself.

KING

Ha! To Retiro! Now the scales are falling
 From these my eyes that see, but long were blind.
 Their plan is murder, death! They go to slay her.
 My horse! My horse!

PAGE

Your horse, illustrious Sire,

Since he was lame, was sent upon your order —

KING

Well then, another; Garcera's, your own.

PAGE

They took the horses, every one, away;
 Led them along, or else have turned them loose.
 The stables have been emptied as the castle.

KING

They think to be there first. I must be quick.
 Get me a horse and though some farmer's nag,
 My thirst for vengeance will provide him wings.
 And if 'tis done? — Then, God above, then grant
 That I, not like a tyrant, but humane,
 May punish guilt and those who have been guilty.

Get me a horse ; else, being one with them,
You'll lose your head as shall they all,
 stops at the door and makes a gesture of
 violence

Aye, all !

hurries away
 The curtain falls.

ACT V

Large hall in the castle of Retiro with one central and two side doors. Signs of destruction everywhere. At the front, left, an overturned dressing table, its utensils in disorder. At the rear, right, another overturned table; above it a painting, half torn from its frame. In the centre of the room a chair. It is dark.

From without, behind the central wall, the sound of voices, footsteps and clash of arms, finally

VOICES
outside

It is enough!

The signal sounds!

To horse!

Sound of voices and footsteps dies out.

Pause. — Then old Isaac comes from the side door, right, dragging along a rug pulled over his head which he later lets fall.

ISAAC

Can they be gone? I hear no noise.
steps back

Yes, there —

No, not a sound. I went and hid myself
When they in robber fashion sacked the castle,

I lay upon the floor all doubled up.
 And used this cover as my roof and shield.
 But now which way? — All I have saved and earned,
 I dug down in the garden long ago;
 I'll get it later when the uproar ceases. —
 Where is the door? How shall I save my soul?

Enter Esther from the door, left

ISAAC

Who comes? Poor me!

ESTHER

Who's there?

ISAAC

Is that you, Rachel?

ESTHER

How say you? Rachel? I am Esther only!

ISAAC

Only, you say? My one and only daughter,
 The one and only, hence the best.

ESTHER

Say rather:

The only one and hence the best. Old man,
 Do you know nothing of today's assault,
 Nor know at whom their raging fury aimed?

ISAAC

I do not know and do not wish to know,
 For Rachel has escaped and is secure.
 Oh, she is shrewd. — God of my fathers!
 Why dost Thou try me, me a poor, old man,
 And speak to me out of my children's mouths?
 But I will not believe. It can't be. No!

sinks down beside the chair in the centre, leaning his head against it

ESTHER

So then be strong through coward fearsomeness.
 But I call others what I was myself.
 When they appeared and I, aroused from sleep,

Into the last, remote and inmost room
 Ran hurriedly to give my sister aid,
 One roughly seized me then with forceful hand,
 And flung me to the floor. And I, poor coward,
 I swooned away, when it had been my task
 To give my own to save my sister's life;
 Or failing that, at least to die with her.
 When I awoke, the evil deed was done.
 Vain all attempts to bring her back to life.
 Then I could weep, then I could tear my hair;
 That is true cowardice, a woman's way.

ISAAC

They tell me this and that. I don't believe it.

ESTHER

Lend me your chair to sit upon, old man!

pushes the chair forward

My limbs grow weak and tremble under me.

Here will I stay and here will I keep watch.

sits down

Perhaps some one may think it worth his while
 To burn the stubble, now the grain is garnered,
 And will return and slay what still is left.

ISAAC

from the floor

Not me! Not me!—There comes one now. Hear that!

Not one, but more!—Save me, I flee to you.

runs to her chair and cowers on the floor

ESTHER

I will protect you, as a mother would,

In second childhood, old and gray with age.

And if death comes, then childless you will die,

I shall precede you in my sister's steps.

*The king appears at the central door with his
 page who carries a torch*

KING

Shall I press further on? Or rest content
 With what I know before my eyes have seen?
 All of the castle, wrecked, laid waste, destroyed,
 Cries shrilly out from every ravaged corner:
 It is too late! The horror has been wrought.

You with your cursed delay, must bear the blame,
 Perhaps, indeed, you were in league with them.
 But no, you weep and tears can tell no lies.
 Look here, I also weep, but weep from rage,
 From unappeased, hot passion for revenge.

Come put your torch here in this iron ring,
 Then rouse the village; gather all the parish
 And bid them with what weapons come to hand
 March to the castle. I myself shall write,
 When morning breaks, a summons to my folk,
 Children of toil, of never-ending labor.
 I at their head will go to seek revenge
 And raze the castles of those haughty peers
 Who, half as servants, half again as lords,
 Serve but themselves and lord it over masters:
 A ruler and the ruled; so it shall be.
 My vengeance will wipe out this hybrid stock
 With pride of blood, of that within their veins
 And that of others, if their swords have shed it.

Leave your torch here and go! I'll stay alone
 And hatch the progeny of my revenge.

*The servant puts his torch in the ring beside
 the door and withdraws*

KING

takes a step forward

What is it moves? Is any life left here?
 Speak out!

ISAAC

Most gracious Sire, Lord Malefactor,
 Have pity, kind assassin!

KING

You, old man?

Do not remind me that she was your child
 Lest it deface her image in my soul.
 And you, are you not Esther?

ESTHER

Sire, I am.

KING

And is it done?

ESTHER

It is.

KING

I did not doubt
 Since first I entered here. So mourn no more!
 For know, the cup is full; an added drop
 Would overflow and make the poison weak.
 While she still lived, I was resolved to leave her.
 Now she is dead, she can no more leave me.
 And this her picture here on this my breast
 Will dig down deep and sink its roots within.
 Was it not I myself who murdered her?
 Had she stayed far from me, she would, a child,
 Still play, her own delight, a joy to others.
 Perhaps — although not that! I tell you, no!
 No other should have ever touched her hand
 And no man's lips have e'er approached her own,
 No shameless arm — She was the king's, his own;
 Had I not seen her, she was no less mine,
 For beauty's might belongs to might enthroned.

ISAAC

He speaks of Rachel?

ESTHER

Yes, of her, your daughter.
 Though grief makes what is lost seem doubly dear,
 I tell you still: you rate her worth too high.

KING

You think so? I tell you, we are but shadows,
 I, you, those others of the common crowd;
 You may be good: your teachers taught you so;
 If I am honest: well, I saw nought else;
 And if those others murder, as they do,
 Their fathers on occasion did the same.
 The world eternally repeats itself
 And seed from seed is its entire harvest.
 But she was truth, not pure nor undefiled,
 Yet all she did sprang from within herself,
 Unbidden, unexpected and unique.
 I felt, when I had seen her, that I lived,
 And in the dreary humdrum of my days
 She only had reality and form.

As in Arabian deserts, people say,
 The traveller, long plagued by seas of sand,
 Head burning from the sun's relentless rays,
 Comes suddenly upon a verdant isle,
 Surrounded by a surge of arid waves,
 There flowers unfold, green trees spread welcome shade,
 The breath of herbs floats gently in the air
 To arch, a second sky, beneath the first.
 A serpent may be coiled beneath the bush,
 A ravening beast, tormented, too, by thirst,
 Has come, perhaps, to seek the cooling spring;
 But still the way-worn traveller exults
 And quaffs with greedy lips the soothing draught
 And falls on grass of lush, luxuriant form.

Luxuriant form. Indeed! I wish to see her:
 See once again her body's proud design,
 The lips that drew in breath and breathed out life,
 And which, grown silent now forevermore,
 Accuse me that I guarded her so ill.

ESTHER

Do not, oh Sire! Now it is done,
 Let it be done. Ours be the cry of mourning;
 You must not cut your ties, Sire, with your folk.

KING

You think so? I am king, do you recall?
 Their crime has touched not her alone but me.
 Just punishment of every guilty deed
 I vowed upon my coronation day
 And I will keep my promise unto death.
 For this I must grow strong, must steel myself,
 For all that man holds dear, in high esteem,
 They will employ as means to curb my wrath:
 Fond memories of care-free boyhood days,
 The man's first meeting with his new-won bride,
 Friendship and gratitude, yes, mercy too,
 All of my life, rolled roughly into one,
 Will rise full armed to offer me resistance
 And challenge me to battle with myself,
 Hence I must first leave my old self behind.
 Her image as I see it here and there,
 On every wall, in this, in yonder corner,
 Reveals her only in her early beauty,
 With faults she had that were so charming too.
 I want to see her broken, torn, maltreated;
 To plunge myself in horror at the sight,
 Compare each bloodstained scar upon her body
 With this portrayal here upon my breast
 And learn to be a monster, like to like.

As Esther has risen

No further word! I will! And now this torch
 Shall point me on my way, aflame like me,
 Alight, because destructive and destroyed.
 She is in yonder last and inmost room
 Where I so oft —?

ESTHER

She is, she was, she will be.

KING

takes the torch

Is not that blood I see upon my way?

It is the way to blood. — Oh night of horror.

leaves by the side door, left

ISAAC

How dark it is.

ESTHER

We are in darkness, yes.

Surrounded by misfortune's fearful night.

At last the day is breaking. Let me try

If I can bear my body's weight so far.

steps to the window and draws the curtains

The dawn is close at hand, its feeble light

Sees, terrified, the horrors of destruction,

The difference from yesterday to now.

points to the jewels strewn on the floor

There see them lie, our fortune's sad remains,

Those glitt'ring baubles, stuff for whose sake we,

Yes, only we — not he who takes the blame —

My sister sacrificed, your foolish daughter.

Whatever comes is just. Those who complain

Accuse themselves and follies they have wrought.

ISAAC

sits down on the chair

I will sit here. Now that the king has come,

I fear not them nor any who may follow.

The centre door opens. Enter Manrique and

Garceran, behind them the queen, leading

her child by the hand; and other nobles

MANRIQUE

Come, enter here; each take his place in line.

We have in much transgressed, and wronged the king,

We sought the good, but not to keep the law.

Now to the law we must submit ourselves.

ESTHER

*on the other side, with a quick movement sets
to rights the overturned table*

Destruction, come to order! Lest they think
That we are cowardly or feel afraid.

QUEEN

See, here they are, those others!

MANRIQUE

What of that!

Their lot has been what ours may prove to be.
Take up your rank and stations, if you please.

QUEEN

Let me come first, I am the guiltiest.

MANRIQUE

Not so, Your Majesty! You spoke the word;
But when we urged the deed, you showed your fear,
Opposed us, plead for mercy, though in vain,
For stern necessity was now our law.
Nor should I like to have his first grim wrath
Discharge itself on heads that we revere
And are, next after him, our throne's sole hope.

I did the deed, not with my hand in truth,
But yet with words, with dreadful stern compassion.
I come before you then. And you, my son,
Have you the heart to answer like a man
For not preventing what you did not further
So that your aim to set the matter right
And your return are not without their guilt?

GARCERAN

I am quite ready. My place is at your side,
And may on me the king's first fury fall.

ESTHER

calls over to them

You there, though you be murderers together
And merit every death and every pain,
Evil enough has been already done;
I would not have these horrors made still more.

The king is with my sister, there within ;
 And raging ere he went, what he there sees
 Will goad him on to new, to greater fury.
 I pity too that woman and her child,
 Half guiltless ; though but half, half guilty, too.
 Go then while there is time, and fear to face
 Revenge that is too frenzied to be just.

MANRIQUE

Know, woman, we are Christians.

ESTIER

As you showed.

My praise is for the Jewess, as God knows !

MANRIQUE

As Christians, also ready to atone
 For our offence and freely yield ourselves.
 Put off your swords. I have laid mine aside.
 The sword a man wears speaks of self-defense.
 Our very number hints we still rebel,
 Dividing guilt that each should wholly bear.

All have laid their swords on the floor before

Manrique

Thus we shall wait. Or rather let one go
 Seek audience from the king forthwith and urge :
 His country's need demands that he decide.
 This way or that ; e'en though he must repent
 Too hasty acts of which we here were victims.
 Go you, my son !

GARCERAN

turns around after having taken several steps

See ! Here the king himself.

*The king rushes out of the apartment at the
 side. After taking a few steps, he turns
 about and stares fixedly at the door*

QUEEN

O God in Heaven !

MANRIQUE

Your Majesty, be calm.

The king steps forward. He halts, with arms folded, before old Isaac who as if asleep reclines in the armchair. He then steps toward the front of the stage

ESTHER

to her father

Look, how your foes are trembling. Are you glad?

Not I. For naught can raise her from the dead.

The king at the front of the stage, gazes at his hands and rubs one over the other as though to wipe them clean. Then he does the same over his body. Finally, he touches his throat, moving his hands around it. In this position, with his hands at his throat, he stands still and stares straight ahead

MANRIQUE

Illustrious Prince and King! Our gracious Master!

KING

starts violently

You here? Well, that you come. I looked for you;

Yes, all of you. You spare me further search.

steps before them and measures them with angry glances

MANRIQUE

points to the weapons lying on the floor

We put our weapons off and laid them down —

KING

I see swords here. You come to slay me then?

I pray, complete your work. Here is my breast.

opens his cloak

QUEEN

He took it off!

KING

What did you say, fair lady?

QUEEN

The evil chain is gone from round his neck.

KING

I'll go and bring it.

*takes a few steps toward the side door and then
stands still*

QUEEN

God, this madness still!

MANRIQUE

We know, indeed, how much we, Sire, have erred;
Not least in failing to entrust your cure
To you yourself and your own noble heart.
But time showed greater urgency than we.
The country rocks. The foe on our frontiers
Demands of us resistance and defense.

KING

And one must punish foes, do you agree?

You warn in time; with such am I surrounded.

Ho, Garceran!

GARCERAN

You mean me, King and Master?

KING

Yes, I mean you. Although you have betrayed me,

You were my friend in other times. Come here.

Tell me, what think you of the girl within?

Well—whom you helped to slay—but of that, later.

What did you think when she was still alive?

GARCERAN

Sir, she was fair.

KING

Yes! And what more beside?

GARCERAN

But wanton too and light, of cunning guile.

KING

And that you hid from me while there was time?

GARCERAN

I told you so.

KING

And I would not believe?
How could that be? I bid you, speak!

GARCERAN

The queen,
She thinks it might be witchcraft.

KING

Idle superstition,
Which now believes what once was make-believe.

GARCERAN

In part of course, it was but natural too.

KING

By natural one should mean what God approves.
And was I not a king, fair-minded, good?
The idol of my subjects, all my folk,
Not lacking sense and most of all not blind.
I say to you: she was not fair.

GARCERAN

You mean?

KING

An ugly line on cheek and chin and mouth,
A lurking something in her fiery glance
Envenomed and disfigured all her beauty.
I've looked on her again and have compared.
When I went in the room to spur my wrath,
Half frightened at my fury's mounting fire,
The outcome was not that I had foreseen.
Instead of wanton pictures from the past,
My wife and child, my people met my eye.
With that her features seemed to twist and turn,
Her arms to move and reach to hold me fast.
I flung her picture then where she lay dead,
And now am here and shudder, as you see.
Now go! Though it was you that have betrayed me,
I am half sad to punish all alike.
Go stand beside your father and the rest.
No difference, for you are guilty, all.

MANRIQUE
with emphasis

And not you too?

KING
after a pause

The man is right; I too.

And yet what is the world, my sorry land,
 If none is pure and all are soiled with guilt?
 Nay, here's my son. Come, stand within our midst;
 You be the guardian spirit of our country,
 Some higher judge may grant us pardon then.
 Come, Doña Clara, take him by the hand!
 A happy fate, has granted you to pass,
 Unsullied by the world, until this day
 Upon your course through life; none is more worthy
 To introduce young innocence to us.
 But stay! Here is the mother. What she did,
 She did it for her child. She is forgiven.

As the queen steps forward and bends her knee

Madoña, do you punish me? You show me
 The posture that befits me at your feet.
 Castilians, hear me well! Here stands your king,
 And here the queen, the regent in his stead.
 I am a mere lieutenant of my son.
 For as the pilgrims, on their gowns a cross,
 For penance journey to Jerusalem,
 Thus I will, mindful of the wrongs I did,
 Lead you against your foe, those infidels
 Who on the far frontier, from Africa
 Menace my folk and this my quiet land.
 If I return, and, with God's grace, as victor,
 Then you shall say if I again be worthy
 To guard the law which I of late transgressed.
 On you this penance falls, on each, on me;
 For in the closest columns of our foes
 You all shall follow me, each one, forthwith.
 And he who falls, does penance for us all.

Thus do I punish you and me. My son
 Here place upon a shield, as on a throne,
 For from today, he is our country's king;
 And ordered thus, we'll go to face our folk.

A shield has been brought

My ladies, will you give my son your hands,
 His first throne is unsteady — like the second.
 You, Garceran, remain here at my side:
 We must for like frivolity atone;
 Let us then fight as though our strength were like.
 And when you free yourself of guilt as I,
 Perhaps this quiet maiden, pure of heart,
 Will hold you worthy of her love and glance.
 You must remake him, Doña Clara, but take care!
 Make virtue seem not merely worth respect
 But loveable as well. That wards off much.

Trumpets in the distance

Hear you? They call us. Those whom I have summoned
 As aid against yourselves, they now are ready
 To fight with us against our common foe,
 The savage Moor who threatens our frontiers,
 And whom I think to send with shame and wounds
 Back to the desert wastelands where he dwells,
 So that our country may be free from evil,
 Within, without, well guarded and secure.
 Lead on! Advance, and if God will, to triumph!

*The procession has already formed. First, some
 vassals; next the shield with the child
 whom the women hold by both hands, then
 the rest of the men. Last, the king, lean-
 ing confidentially on Garceran*

ESTHER

turns toward her father

You see, they are already calm and glad,
 Already planning marriages to be.
 They are the great, and slew for their atonement day

A victim from the ranks of little men,
And now clasp hands still reeking with its blood.

steps to the centre of the stage

But I, I prophecy to you, proud king :
Go forth, go forth, in your forgetful splendor —
You feel my sister's power no longer binds
Because the sharpness of her spell is dulled
And you threw off what once had lured you on.
When on the battle-field your wavering ranks
Are shaken by your foe's o'erwhelming force
And but a pure and strong and guiltless heart
Is fit to face the danger and its threats ;
When you look upward then toward heedless heaven,
Then will the image of your murdered victim,
Not in the sumptuous beauty that beguiled you,
Defaced, deformed, as she displeased your eye,
Appear before your timorous quavering soul !
Then in repentance will you beat your breast,
Then think upon the Jewess of Toledo.

takes her father by the shoulder

Come, father, come, where we have work to do.

points to the side door

ISAAC

as though awaking

But first I'll get my gold.

ESTHER

You think of that

When face to face with sorrow and distress?
Then I take back the curse which I pronounced,
Then you are guilty too, and I — and she.
We too, as they, amid sin's liegemen live;
Then God forgive us as we them forgive.

stretches her arms out toward the side door

The curtain falls.

ESTHER

Dramatic Fragment

by

Franz Grillparzer

Translated by

Arthur Burkhard



THE REGISTER PRESS
YARMOUTH PORT, MASSACHUSETTS

1953

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PRINTED AT THE REGISTER PRESS
YARMOUTH PORT, MASSACHUSETTS
U. S. A.

ESTHER

C H A R A C T E R S

AHASUERUS, *King of Persia.*

HAMAN, *the king's first Councillor.*

ZERESIL, *his wife.*

ARIDAI, *her brother.*

TERESH }
BIGTHAN } *Cup-bearers of the king.*

NESMAL, *one of the nobles.*

FIRST }
SECOND } *Courtier.*
THIRD }

FIRST }
SECOND } *Councillor of the king.*

GATEKEEPER *at the palace of Ahasuerus.*

CAPTAIN *of the royal guard.*

HIRAM, *a black man, Chamberlain of Queen Vashti.*

MORDECAI, *a Jew.*

ESTHER, *his niece.*

COURTIERS, ATTENDANTS OF THE KING, SLAVES,

ARMED MEN.

PLACE OF THE ACTION: SUSA AND VICINITY.

ACT I

Large hall in the royal palace at Susa. At the rear, an enclosure of golden lattice-work, higher than a man, about which twine grape-vines that grow out of richly ornamented vases.

Enter Bigthan, the cup-bearer

BIGTHAN

I pass astounded through the empty halls;
The chambers, filled until this day with folk,
With courtly splendor, motley crowds of servants,
Are hushed and bare. Am I in Shushan then,
The palace of my king, of Asia's master?
And none, too, here to read the riddle's meaning?
Can that be Zeresh, Haman's wife, who comes,
The great man's wife and well disposed toward me?
And he, on whom she leans, is he not like
To Teresh, my compatriot and friend?

Enter Zeresh, Haman's wife, supported by Teresh

BIGTHAN

Your servant, noble lady, bids you welcome!
And greetings from the heart, my friend, to you! —
But you avoid me, draw away your hand,
And fix your eyes upon the marble floor?
You too, I clearly see, are sad in heart;

And void of men are all this castle's halls.
What is amiss? What can this mourning mean?

steps up to Teresh

ZERESH

Leave him, for he is wroth; indeed with cause!
And, if you be astonished at our grief,
We are far more to find you light of heart.

BIGTHAN

But what occurred? Give me a clear account!

ZERESH

Have you come lately from the moon, pray tell,
That you learned nothing of this country's sorrow?

BIGTHAN

From Babylon I have been summoned here
That I, like Teresh, serve the king his wine.

ZERESH

Were called? By whom?

BIGTHAN

Why, by the queen!

ZERESH

turns to Teresh, laughing in scorn

Ha, ha!

And all the journey long, from there to here,
Did you learn naught that prompted to delay?

BIGTHAN

I travelled fast, on roads but little used.
I heard, of course, of none too grave disputes
Prevailing in my lord and master's house.

ZERESH

Then learn from what I tell you: these disputes
Consist of nothing more or less than: Vashti,
The queen, protectress of both you and him, —
So gracious, although proud, to me a friend —
Is banned, the king is wed to her no more.

BIGTHAN

Some God prevent!

TERESH

Too late! But not for vengeance!

BIGTHAN

I am aghast. Our prince's love for her
Had seemed so warm, so little prone to change.

ZERESH

That is the way with all these weakling men
Who live and are but in and through a woman.
Out of the storehouse of their deepest wishes
They richly clothe the object of their love.
All sorts of beauty, even those ill-matched,
They match to place on her beloved brow.
But when the day comes, charging them with error,
Disjoining what should never have been joined,
Then ferment stirs in them and their self-will
Exiles in hate what once it thought to love.

BIGTHAN

to Teresh

What could have been the reason?

ZERESH

Have done! Have done!

He pours forth wrath, not wisely pondered words.
But you can learn this much at least from me:
To mark his coronation day's return,
The king here in this palace held a banquet
So rich, the splendors that our fathers knew
Seemed colorless beside these feast-days' pomp.
Eight days the noisy festival had lasted,
From East and West the stranger sought our gate
And wine in streams flowed from the golden vessels
Which, overmastered Asia's priceless spoils,
The king's great predecessors — mark, not he! —
Had hoarded up in Shushan's treasure vaults.
At last, ears ringing with stale flatteries,
Praised as the son and darling of the gods,
The prince resolved, against our strictest custom,
That she, his crowning fortune, most his own,

That she, his wife, to wondering crowds be shown.
 And he sent heralds forth to find the queen
 To summon her before him, in his hall.
 But she had banquets spread, he knew it well, like him,
 With women as her guests where he had men;
 And since she was the crown of modesty —
 Taught by her friends whose minds were like her own —
 She thought it wrong for her, neglecting both
 Her hostess' task and custom's holy law,
 To show herself unveiled before the throng.
 She did not come. The king—his servants all about him
 Who felt they also lacked the force, perhaps,
 To be the masters in their own abodes,
 And in the blow directed at the princess
 Were plotting action that would strike their wives—
 The king, attended so, and so advised,
 Bursts out in wrath. A second servant goes;
 And he returns, but with no more success.
 The prince then thrusts the table at his feet
 Away with force and swears: A twelvemonth long
 He will not look upon that woman's face.
 Scarce spoken, comes the princess' chamberlain,
 Demanding on this oath the golden key
 Which opened, nights, her chambers to the king.
 There was an end. The key is sent forthwith,
 And when the queen the morning after, veiled,
 Confronts the king among his councillors
 Demanding leave to join her folk at home
 In view of insults she had here endured,
 The prince then hands her calmly her dismissal,
 And she must leave, perhaps against her will.
 But bitter vengeance came to seek him out.
 For living in remembrance of her beauty
 He roams the palace, from himself estranged.
 The business of the kingdom lies untended,
 And yet the stubbornness the gods supplied,
 A sorry substitute for strength of will he lacks,

Keeps our good prince from doing what alone
Will further him and with him all the state:
Recalling her, who is, alas, far off.

walks away to the back of the stage

TERESH

quickly to Bigthan, aside

She is not far; her trusted chamberlain,
The black man, Hiram, tarries here in town.
If you are brave, and if your gratitude
To her is still so warm —

ZERESH

returns to them

Look you, he comes,
On whose advice the king had chiefly acted
When he so gravely wronged our queen and friend.
He is my husband, yet I am his foe;
I might run off, but it would look like fear.

BIGTHAN

Yet formerly your word had weight with him.

ZERESH

I gave him since that day no friendly word.

BIGTHAN

But your defiance even won you favors,
And if you made your opposition firm —

ZERESH

Shall I confess? The man is small and timid,
I scarcely heed him; yet there have been times,
That with his way of groping, like a snail,
He often hit upon a useful scheme
More surely than a wise and bolder man.
I will await what turn his scheming takes.
Why, there he comes, and see, how pitiful!

*Enter Haman, right, with Aridai, Nesmal and
several other nobles*

HAMAN

to one of the councillors

I beg you, sir! I cannot go before you!
You are the elder; precedence must be yours!

The person addressed refuses

HAMAN

No, no! Why, under our late, blessed king
You with success had headed great affairs.
Compared to you, I am the merest lad!

ZERESH

laughs loudly

Ha, ha!

HAMAN

I notice we are not alone.
For is that not your sister, Aridai?
This is no place for women, tell her that!
Zeresh, we others came here on official business.

ZERESH

I call my business here official, too.
The queen has been disgracefully dismissed,
Her retinue has not, though, been dissolved;
And as its head, no private room within,
And least this public hall, is closed to me.

HAMAN

Yes, she is right. The queen's whole retinue
Is still intact. And there are matters pending
On which a woman's counsel might give help.
— Ah, Cousin Teresh!—And who is that other?

BIGTHAN

steps forward

I am named Bigthan, come from Babylon,
Whence I was called to serve the king with wine.
This document —

hands over a document

HAMAN

Cup-bearer, good.

BIGTHAN

My father,
Mamri, the general, was to you well known.

HAMAN

My good old friend, so close to me from youth.
Your name? — Ah, yes!

BIGTHAN

My name is Bigthan.

HAMAN

Good,
And come?

BIGTHAN

From Babylon.

HAMAN

Have you no written word?

BIGTHAN

You hold it in your hand.

HAMAN

Ah yes, ah yes!

How fares your worthy father?

BIGTHAN

He is dead.

HAMAN

How? Dead? Old Bigthan, dead!

BIGTHAN

His name was Mamri,
I am the one called Bigthan.

HAMAN

Yes, I know;

And are from Niniveh.

BIGTHAN

From Babylon

Whence I have come on summons from the queen.

HAMAN

The queen. Quite right. You take the very words
That hovered on my lips, straight from my mouth.
Now you may leave.

ZERESH

Nay, stay.

HAMAN

That too! That too!

What we discuss, is everyone's concern,
The universal need. So close to all
That to the first and nearest in the street
I might well say: My friend, have you a plan?
If so, speak out and take this old man's thanks,
Yes, your compatriot's tears as your reward.

wipes a tear from his eye

Our ruler's present state, it is well-known.
Secluded in the most remote of chambers,
He slights his empire, to his waiting servants
Refuses answer, message and command.
Invalid, null and void are all these papers,
points to a table on which he has placed documents

They lack what gives them life, his signature;
And all the wheels of state no longer move.

I therefore turn to all those who will hear.
If one can help, let him step forth and speak;
And though my foe, my brother he shall be.

I just said brother; well you, Aridai,
You are the brother of this wife of mine.
She, I know well, is wise; and now and then
You talk together, touching this or that.
If you perchance have thought up any plan,
Keep us from error, give us your advice.

ARIDAI

My plan is simple like the case itself.
The king is grieving that the queen is gone;
Bid her return, and you will heal his woe.

HAMAN

Your plan is simple; yes, perhaps too simple.
For quite aside from all the ugly quarrels

With which revenge and hate, new patronage,
 In such a change like to become involved:
 Do you believe the king would give consent?
 His love has been transmuted into hate.
 He hates the woman who — he says, not I —
 Repaid with scanty thanks his warm affection.
 If your plan pleases you: try it yourself,
 You be its sponsor. I will keep my head.

ONE OF THE NOBLES

Then but one course remains: another marriage.
 The Prince of India's daughter still is free.

HAMAN

Quite good.

A SECOND NOBLE

Then too on Egypt's rich frontier
 Lies, fought about for long, a strip of coast.
 Now to the suitor for his daughter's hand will Pharaoh give
 What he denies the warrior's stubborn sword.

HAMAN

Still better. That is: I say good or better
 Yet think: perhaps not feasible at that.
 At least to me the prince seems not so minded
 As to accept, of his free will at least,
 A new wife owed to other choice than his.
 I say, then — Teresh, do you shake your head?
 Tell us your thoughts; we listen gladly.

TERESH

I hear much talk of benefit and profits;
 One thing no one has mentioned: what is right.
 If Vashti truly is our ruler's wife,
 Can there be any doubt how we should act?

HAMAN

Right here! Right there! The right way is the right!
 That is: what all think right, hence can be done.
 You talk as does a novice, young, untaught;
 Try out in business for a year or two,
 If that does not cure scruples and your doubts,

Then serve to others wine at drinking bouts:
 You never will drink any wine yourself.
 Then too our ruler's marriage is dissolved.
 So do not trouble right, but ask of wisdom.
 Now, if I think — but we are being watched.
 A noise behind us. — By the god of light!
 It is the king himself. My knees grow weak!
 Come, get you back. He soon will pass us by.
 Most likely makes his way through that green walk
 To reach the park, or elsewhere — Back, and hush!

They withdraw toward both sides

*The king who has before been visible in the
 arbor now appears at its central archway,
 breaking off leaves and throwing them to
 the ground*

KING

Not even here secure in palace walls
 From vermin and foul worms? Upon these heights,
 Here should the air be pure, the soil be rich
 And favor every growth throughout the years;
 But creatures low and vile creep up the heights
 And whereso life, or great or small, appears,
 A worm creeps in, there dwells a cause for tears.
catches sight of the courtiers, to right and left
 And there they stand, the foes of all that thrives
 That slowly crawling brood who gnaw unheard,
 Bore into every leaf until it folds
 And bitterly curls in upon itself,
 Grows yellow, hard, and dies. The evil here,
 That fastens on the heel of what is good,
 And as a bitter leaf in noble wine
 The liquor's hundred fold redoubled measure
 Will sooner ruin with its evil taste
 Than lose its vileness in good wine at last.

You bow before me? Do you mock me then?
 Am I your master? No; you, you are mine.

For though with each of you alone I can
 Cut off and cast his head before his feet,
 Together you are mightier than I.
 You are my eyes, you are my ears, through you
 The voice of supplication comes to me.
 You gather for my vision feeble rays
 That, intermingling and how oft reflected,
 From far below but dimly reach the throne.
 You are the arms that wield what power I hold,
 My aides who bear my blessing through the land.
 If you are bad, so am I too; a tyrant,
 Who would that he were love because he loves.
 And hence I hate you as we hate our masters,
 As you hate me, I know. You wrecked my happiness,
 Made poison of the peace within my home.
 Through you I am unhappy, and revenge
 At times foams hot in my impassioned breast;
 Yet I fear you and so abandon you,
 And one thing I repeat, already said:
 United, you are awesome, since immortal,
 Because you are the mob, the crowd, all that is low,
 That ever lives, since ever bred anew.
 But let one singly come across my path
 To spy, to pry, to menace and betray,
 He pays for all and has lived out his time.
 My soul springs up in horror. What is man?

withdraws

After a pause during which the courtiers, coming from both sides, advance

BIGTHAN

Was that the king?

ARIDAI

I ask myself the same;

Is that the prince whose gentle spirit held
 An all embracing love of human kind;

Whose word was pardon, his appearance mercy?
And now undone, his very soul transformed.

ZERESH

No one is pure. The bad will have its say;
Who does not mix it drop by drop with good,
Him it will drench by buckets like a flood.
But I am glad it chanced, and as it did.

HAMAN

What we but now have seen, though long have known
Lends strength to an opinion that I cherished.
Our ruler has a heart; and who has none?
And there rest root and reason for his grief.
His heart would have communion. But with whom?
The folk are too far off; and us, us others,
Who stand more closely, us he does not love,
Mistakes us, our affection, our distress.
So but one thing remains: a wife, a wife.
But how bring this about? For what was said
Of heirs to princes or of Pharaoh's daughters
Is futile; he will wave them all away.
He wants something idyllic: quiet, home-grown bliss;
I, therefore, say, let us renew the custom,
In force in Persia in our father's time,
Assemble from far reaches of our realm
All who their beauty, charm and grace enhance
Far more than hide in donning woman's dress,
And bring them here to court for him to choose.
Let him then — as his fathers did before —
Take all the lovely company to bed,
Or choose the fairest one alone to wed,
Our goal is reached both ways: his heart is filled:
No longer lonely but in love, his thought
Of subject's welfare, hate of men, forgot.
Our realm is large, we need at least a year
To summon all these fair recruits to hand.
I, therefore, in whose jurisdiction lie
The districts that are nearest to the court

Already in my zeal have made a start:
 For some time notices pass through the land
 To bring all young and charming maids to court.
 We hope that none, we'll let not one withstand,
 The scornful we shall force; all must report.

walks off triumphantly

FIRST COURTIER

You heard him?

SECOND COURTIER

Yes!

FIRST COURTIER

Sheer treason, that, in fact!

The full assembly must approve the act.

SECOND COURTIER

Shall he give us a princess all his own?

FIRST COURTIER

She will reward what he for her has done.

THIRD COURTIER

I will not have it, I shall mount my horse
 In haste to my own Bactria take my course
 And there will issue similar commands.

FIRST COURTIER

Too late; the present orders tie your hands.

THIRD COURTIER

We must resist!

SECOND COURTIER

To yield would be disgrace.

FIRST COURTIER

Successful he will take our monarch's place.

Exeunt the councillors

ZERESH

to Teresh and Bigthan

Ha, ha! I told you so! The fox is cunning,
And cleverly outwitted them. But know,
There is one stone he first must leap across,
And that am I. He shall not find it easy.
Have courage, Teresh, and do not despair.
For Vashti, for our princess, blood and life!

Exeunt all

Rural scene outside the walls of Susa. In the background, left a cottage.

Enter Esther from the right. She walks to the door of the cottage

ESTHER

Unlock the gate! Or else your life will pay —
'Tis I, 'tis Esther, your devoted daughter.
Unless you open, I shall shake the door,
By Heaven, I'll break the lock and bend the bolts.
Now, it gives way at last. He raised the latch.

The door opens and Mordecai steps out, looking pale and distraught

ESTHER

Just as I thought! How will, how can this end?
The whole night long, you never closed an eye,
Remained awake amid your writings, books;
And when this morning, lest I might disturb you,
I silently crept off, strolled round about,
I find you, on returning, spellbound still,
Your chair the same, in hand the self-same books.
Why do you trust so much to failing strength?
Man's body is more feeble than his mind,
Though oft, of course, these words must be reversed.

MORDECAI

to himself

So spake the Lord —

ESTHER

Give heed to what I say,
Who love you, not indeed as God loves us,

The whole great body, where the loss of one
Becomes another's gain; no, you alone,
Not willing for the welfare of a world
To sacrifice one atom of your being.

MORDECAI

You show most clearly how you women love,
And how the sense for greatness is denied you.

ESTHER

No, not denied us; also we are ready
To give a life therefor, but ours alone;
The fate of those we love is held in trust.

MORDECAI

lays his hand upon her head

I should be quite content, if only you
Did not disdain the books of holy writ.

ESTHER

Why take up reading, with so much to see?
Why silent letters, with so much to hear?

MORDECAI

My spirit lives in times that are no more,
And which the holy books bring back to mind.
Our people, yes, it was of God ordained
To be the topmost peak of this broad earth,
The center of the nations far and near.
And as the radiant sun, the moon and stars,
However lordly be their stately show,
Are yet made but to serve the earth below:
So all the nations' majesty and fame,
Yes, what their might, their conquests can secure,
Will serve our race, though we now seem obscure.

ESTHER

Who knows?

MORDECAI

What?

ESTHER

Whether sun and moon, the stars
Are made to serve this earth of ours alone.

MORDECAI

Why else?

ESTHER

Each one, perhaps, is for itself.
And if the moon were privileged to think,
It might well hold the earth to be its servant.

MORDECAI

You then have doubts about our people's fame?

ESTHER

Not so; I only wish that we might praise it less
And other folk would recognize it more;
One's own appraisal is a faulty standard.

MORDECAI

The Lord revealed himself to us alone.
From our day back to times mankind was young
There runs a bond, unbroken, ever on,
That marks us as his own, the Highest's children.

ESTHER

And sometimes wayward ones who disobey.

MORDECAI

As such the Lord has chastened us as well,
Has led us far from homes we held so dear
To bitter slavery and servitude.
And yet — 'tis written in those sacred books —
Through many nights awake, deprived of sleep,
My body's fasts increasing strength of mind,
The sense of those dark words to me grew clear:
With such a hero will our folk be blessed
The world will bow before him, East and West,
A joyous prince, lord over all mankind.

ESTHER

A man of arms?

MORDECAI

I am as yet unsure.
If not, how else? Can ever the oppressed
Win liberty unless they use a sword?
And from the stem of David he will be,

Sprung from that blood to which you too belong,
 You happy child, not I though, through your mother.
 Oh, could you feel the worth of such descent,
 Which daily greater grows, since daily shrinks
 Their number who can call our kings their fathers,
 And unto whom the promise is confined.
 Were but a spark of that high spirit yours,
 That urged on Deborah, gave strength to Jael,
 And made of Judith a heroine to her folk.

ESTHER

Then shall I kill, deceive, shall I betray,
 To be a worthy daughter of my house?

MORDECAI

You must feel ready, being who you are,
 For any great attempt the time demands.

ESTHER

The time for greatness may be really here.
 Have you not heard? They seek for him, their liege,
 For Asia's king, a wife, whom they will choose
 Among the people, from the common folk.
 A call goes forth that summons all our maidens,
 Not uglier than I, to come to court
 Where then the prince may make his royal choice.

MORDECAI

And those unwilling?

ESTHER

Will be forced.

MORDECAI

Great God!

ESTHER

Be calm, our origins alone protect us,
 For Israel, high in its own esteem,
 Is low in worth among all neighboring folk;
 Who likes to give a Jewess hand and ring?

MORDECAI

You mention such disgrace without a blush?

ESTHER

Well, after all! You first took fright at danger
 And now at what will save us, too. But look!
 Our neighbor over there, our foolish Kosru,
 From whom the knowledge of these matters came,
 He hid his wife, ill-favored as she is,
 But who seems fair to him, inside his house.
 But now he thinks that this security,
 A double one, is not secure enough.
 And both take flight in panic for the woods.
 There comes a troop of men. Their weapons bare!
 They are the messengers, the king's.

MORDECAI

Go in! —

Stay, rather! God of Israel, of my fathers!
 Be it your will, to raise one of our folk
 High as the queen to Asia's glorious throne
 To be a shield there for her exiled brothers,
 To lead them home, may be, to their own land,
 And build anew the Covenant's ancient temple,
 —Stay, Esther, stay! — I gladly give her up,
 Would ten times over give my own life up
 In honor of my God, of my own folk.
 Let us, my child, await what is to come;
 Whatso it be, it comes, trust, from above.

*Enter a captain of the royal guard with attend-
 ants, among them armed men*

CAPTAIN

as he enters

Yes, have the horses saddled to go home!
 Not one who satisfies what we demand.
 We reached the end, I think!

scans his written orders

No, one more name.

One Mordecai lives here?

MORDECAI

Sir, I am he.

CAPTAIN

And with a daughter?

MORDECAI

Niece.

CAPTAIN

This maiden here! —

lowers himself on one knee

Come, if you please, with me.

MORDECAI

It is God's will.

ESTHER

Go with him? Father, hear! My uncle, speak!

Do you abandon me without a word?

Then I myself will speak, my own defense.

to the captain

I cannot follow, for besides the horror

For such a brutal, tyrannous conscription

Which, if it be your monarch's own desire,

Shows me he never learned of true affection,

My race —

MORDECAI

Be still! Would you revile your own?

CAPTAIN

Nor does it serve. I am not so empowered.

But with my eyes they bade me make my choice,

What else impedes or recommends will be

At higher levels later heard and judged.

MORDECAI

You hear? His words are like to heavenly voices,

And my opinion is as he has said.

I'll stand beside you, and when time demands,

I shall step forth, the guardian of your weal.

CAPTAIN

Well then, once more I sink upon my knees,
 And ask of you to follow; praying, too,
 That if the master judge as did his servant,
 You one day at the crest of power remember
 I was the one who led you to the throne.

to his attendants

Bring on the horses!

ESTHER

Must I really then —

MORDECAI

There is no choice.

ESTHER

Can this be dreaming?

They make ready to depart

The curtain falls.

ACT II

A lavishly furnished room inside the palace.

Enter Esther, followed by several others

ESTHER

What is their aim? Where will they lead me next?
Why was I taken from my uncle's side?
There was no talk of that when they enticed me,
Yes, forced me from my home away to court.
And no reply. Can all of them be mute?
Tell me, or are they slaves who speak no word,
Who are content to hearken and obey?
And others in the palace seems amazed.
They whisper, lurk as though some plan of theirs,
Long cherished, had been thwarted all at once.
What this may mean for me must soon appear.
There come two men, it seems, of higher rank,
Those two will dare at least to speak, I hope.

*Two councillors have come in and retire to the
opposite side of the stage*

FIRST COUNCILLOR

softly

I tell you, Haman's influence is gone.

SECOND COUNCILLOR

Quite so. The king is irked at the attempt
To mate him, so he says; as we for girls
Provide a dowry and seek suitors out.

FIRST COUNCILLOR

With scornful laugh he scanned the motley ranks,
 Puts questions to them, scarcely hears the answer,
 Grows wroth, laughs sharply, bids them all begone.

SECOND COUNCILLOR

His eyes seek out the author of the scheme
 Who hides afraid among the crowd at court.

FIRST COUNCILLOR

He will, of course, in time, hit on the man.

BOTH

And Haman's influence is gone for good.

Enter Haman, wiping his brow

HAMAN

Our lord, it seems, will not accept our plan.
 But who can know each whim of those who rule?
 A faithful servant finds his own reward
 In knowing that he strove for what is good.

to the Councillors

God's greeting, good my lords!

both look away in the opposite direction

They do not hear.

That is: they trim their sails to suit the wind.

The girls I must admit were stupid, foolish,
 And looked like scare-crows in a farmer's field.
 Have Persia's handsome wives no fairer daughters?
 God willed it so. But those whom I assigned,
 Who for me bargained and sought out the wares,
 Them will I smite and with the sword of wrath.
 It is not sure, though, who will rage and tremble.

to the councillors

You, good my lords, and if it now should please —

They make off through the side door, right

It is quite clear they think me lost. Good Heaven!
 Is there no hope?

catches sight of Esther

One hope though, still is left.

Our lord has seen as yet but swarming crowds
 They showed him grouped together in the halls.
 The eminent, unique, the best of all,
 Whom we had wisely set apart in rooms,
 They still remain, and first and foremost, this one.
 Good breeding, wit and common sense appear
 When girls are wise and shrewdly show their charm.

approaches Esther

My child, to us the coming hour will matter much.

ESTHER

To us?

HAMAN

To you and me. The king draws near.

ESTHER

For now it matters though to you alone.

HAMAN

To me? What of his choice, if he choose you?

ESTHER

I have no fear that I shall please his taste.

HAMAN

She has no fear! What monstrous lack of sense!

And yet again, not bad. 'Tis new, at least.

The like can please; the rest were up for sale

With prices right; and she, she "has no fear."

But keep to this, and if it be a pose,

Be sure you never once forget your part;

If it be truth — that would, of course, be worse —

But even truth may sometimes be of use.

Above all bear in mind how well I thought

To serve not only you but all the rest,

How all my fortune hangs upon this day.

For courts count not in terms of more and less,

You please or you displease; and who displeases

Has lived his life out long before his death.

Bear this in mind and use your wit, my child.

Could I but throw myself before your feet
 And clasp your knees, my one remaining hope.
 They come. The king himself. This hour decides.

ESTHER

How sad a sight! So foolish, weak a man.

*Enter through the centre door the king with
 attendants who withdraw*

KING

Why, here you are, my sage and clever counsel.
 Except that here the counsel counselled badly.
 You see: like ever will revert to like
 And vulgar minds provide us vulgar counsel.
 All men, yes, all are so. When they tell lies,
 They think how shrewd they are. Treason is cunning,
 And harshness, firm resolve. To have no conscience,
 Be deaf when fellow men cry out in pain,
 Seem proof of greatness than can scorn small matters.
 And if, by chance, taught in the market-place,
 They learn through telltale friends a thing or two
 That others do not know, each one believes
 Himself more wise than all wise men together.
 I think to set my palace here to rights.
 I note one useful purpose anger serves:
 It rouses heartache to activity.

to Esther

For you, my child, there is no more to do;
 I grant you now permission to depart.

Esther, with a bow, turns to the door

KING

You go so gladly, I am led to think
 They must have brought you here by forceful means;
 An added guilt for heads already laden.

turns to Haman

ESTHER

quickly

No, not by force.

KING

You wished to come?

ESTHER

I came,

As now I go, since someone so decreed.

KING

Without regret because your hope miscarried?

ESTHER

My hope?

KING

You know why you were summoned here.

ESTHER

Say, rather, that my fear is now dispelled.
 This man, however senseless may have been
 What he proposed, erred less by his intent,
 It would appear, than from too great a zeal.

KING

You too consider senseless what he planned?

ESTHER

What else?

KING

to Haman

You hear!

to Esther

Yet, all in all —

You seem a girl of sense — yet, all in all,
 It is but natural that any man
 Who grieves when he is parted from his wife,
 Have other women shown him for his choice.

to Haman

You must not listen, go.

HAMAN

But —

KING

gently

I have spoken.

How loathsome hearing always but oneself
And empty echoes all the others make.

Exit Haman

KING

to Esther

You owe me a reply to what I asked.

ESTHER

My lord is jesting with his lowly maid.

KING

And what would you propose in such a case?

ESTHER

I?

KING

Yes, you.

ESTHER

Nothing.

KING

That is cruel.

ESTHER

We heal the sick, but those of bitter mood
We trust and hope the world and time will cure.

KING

But if it be the world has sinned against them?

ESTHER

We sin so much, my lord, against the world,
When we subtract, the balance is against us.

KING

You do not flatter.

ESTHER

Flattery would not help!

KING

Besides, they likewise tell us that we kings
Can give the world such happiness that all
The world returns us will not pay the debt.

ESTHER

It hardly can be true.

KING

You think so? Well!

Then, too, for us the question still remains:
 What course to follow in this case, my case?
 As choosing one from many does not suit you,
 Then naught is left but turning to the one.

ESTHER

Quite so.

KING

And she, the one you mean would be —
aside

I might have known it, this entire display
 Of seeming artlessness and innocence
 Was but a mask to hide her real intentions.

aloud

You seem to weigh the question.

ESTHER

Not at all.

KING

And she, the one you mean, is called? — Speak out! —
 Her name, why, you must know it surely?

ESTHER

Vashti,

The queen.

KING

steps back in surprise

You really speak her name? In truth!

ESTHER

Bid her come back, with her your joy returns.
 A new bond now would mean a new beginning,
 With her alone can you resume your life.
 And as the wound, closed by a skilful hand,
 If given time, invisibly will mend:
 The fibres that are torn apart will join,
 And healing humors born within the body
 Build bridges, bearing blood from cell to cell
 Till not a trace remains to leave a scar,

So you will stand, your body's health restored,
 In all your former strength and manly beauty.
 Say not, she has her faults, lacks this or that.
 For woman is a part of man's own self;
 And who has e'er in spite cut off his arm
 Because it did not suit, lopped off his foot
 Because it seemed too long, gouged out his eye
 Because 'tis brown not blue. Bear what is light
 That some one help you bear the heavy load.
 And if of women you should find the best,
 Can you give her the many memories,
 The other shares with you from days of youth
 When life first blossoms, every wish is pliant,
 When from one cut in bitter-sweet affection
 The graft and stock have joined in loving growth
 To bear the common fruit of one existence?
 Old age, my lord, I see it in my uncle,
 Is wise and prudent; youth, however, sacred.
 Preserve it in the friend you loved in youth.

KING

Experience speaks thus?

ESTHER

How do you mean?

KING

Do you know love?

ESTHER

How is that your concern?

Our discourse here is not of me: of you;

I think I can with ease arrange alone.

KING

What is your name?

ESTHER

Quite simply: Esther, Sire!

Hadassah those who dwell beside me say.

I do not need support nor help and counsel,

And all my duties I discharge myself;

But you upon the steep and lonely heights,

Weighed down by care about so many things,
 You need someone to help, to be a comrade,
 On whom you can put off your varied load
 And say: You take it, while I catch my breath.
 Oh — if you do not trust the men at court —
 That you would somehow tell me: Go, Hadassah,
 And bring me back the sovereign of my joys,
 The deeply missed, un-superseded friend!

KING

So you know where she is?

ESTHER

That was distrust!
 You ask for trust and have none? Seek goodwill
 And hold suspicion? Oh, my poor, poor prince!
 Things great and good are not for sale; we barter,
 And we receive no more than what we give.

KING

You cannot know the woman, then, the one
 For whom you speak, or you would praise her less.
 For she is proud.

ESTHER

Of you.

KING

And vengeful.

ESTHER

Give

Her nothing to avenge.

KING

And jealous —

ESTHER

Sire!

What women show as jealousy is love;
 In men alone is vanity beside.

KING

She does not love me then.

ESTHER

*gives him a quick glance and then casts down
her eyes*

KING

You hear, Hadassah?

She does not love me, and has never loved me —
Why do you shake your head and not believe?

ESTHER

That would be bad indeed.

KING

It is, it is, Hadassah.

ESTHER

Else I had thought, Sire —

KING

What?

ESTHER

What merits love—

One simply loves.

KING

You too?

ESTHER

I meant the queen.

KING

And say all this with glances turned aside?

ESTHER

What will it serve? If what I said was wrong,
Then no one can advise you, no one help you.
And therefore I will go. My uncle waits,
Disturbed, perhaps, because I tarry here.
I scarcely know the door by which I came.

KING

points to the side door, right

Was it not here?

ESTHER

If so, then, Sire, farewell!

And if —

KING

Yes, what?

ESTHER

If I too boldly spoke —

KING

Not bold; no, true. And what you did not say
I hope was true.

ESTHER

I do not understand you.

And so again, farewell.

KING

You too, Hadassah.

Exit Esther

KING

at the centre door

Haman!

HAMAN

enters

Your Majesty!

KING

Who is that maiden?

Tell me from where she comes. Who are her parents?

HAMAN

If you command, sir, we shall search with zeal —

KING

Do not!

HAMAN

Are you still wroth?

KING

extends his hand to be kissed

As often, chance

Will plead the cause where understanding errs.

*At a sign from the king Haman leaves by the
centre door.*

Esther returns

ESTHER

This way does not lead out. Room follows room,
 Row after row, in sumptuous profusion,
 And everywhere stand slaves whose wordless bending
 Reflects the lonely silence, never ending.
 No way, Sire, here leads out!

KING

No, it leads in!
 You know? You there were in my chambers.

ESTHER

Oh!

KING

Does that seem bad? And if it were your lot
 In future, in these very rooms, perhaps —

ESTHER

points to the centre door and goes toward it
 This is the door through which I came, I know.

KING

stands before the door
 No, not until you render me account!
 What if I said to you: Remain, Hadassah;
 See whether you find me as I found you.

ESTHER

You know I have to go.

KING

bars the way

Not till you speak.

ESTHER

That is not noble!

KING

Right, you spoke a word
 Which like a magic wand unlocks the portals.
 We use no force.

steps away from the door

And you are free to leave. —
 But you do not — you stay — Believe, Hadassah,
 You long to leave here now; but, hardly gone,

You will be longing to come back. I know.
 Affection that is born of like intent
 Does not seize one and leave the other free;
 For closeness means the being close of two;
 You hurt the other, harm will come to you.

points to the centre door

Outside is turmoil and the thronging court,
 Within here quiet dwells,

points to the side door

and you can think,

Can ponder here in pleasant contemplation.

We have too what propriety demands —

*As he claps his hands, slaves appear and range
 themselves on both sides. One of them
 bears a golden crown*

Nay, look! How well they have been trained! They bear
 The golden chaplet for my chosen bride,
 And do not know my choice has borne no fruit.

takes the crown

See how the crown becomes you, do you mind?

*Since she makes a gesture of refusal while he
 is giving the crown back*

How well I knew no happiness is mine,
 And I must pass through death's dark door alone.

*Esther quickly seizes the crown and places it
 upon her head*

KING

Hadassah!

as she is about to take off the crown

Stop! No, do not touch the crown.

There shall be no decision yet, not yet!

Lead her within, for quiet and reflection,
 I shall myself meanwhile withdraw elsewhere.

And when the little hour of time has passed,

And I return to ask her once again:

Hadassah!

ESTHER

stops on the threshold
Sire!

KING

Enough! Her voice was proof.
Away, you! I myself will lead her in.

clasps her in his arms

And what you think, confide it to my ear.

Exeunt both, followed by others

Outside the royal palace at Susa. The rear is closed off by a stone wall. Away from the centre, toward the right, a large gateway; beside it, a recess in the wall with a bench. To the left, joining the wings, the dwelling of the gatekeeper, raised by a few steps and planted with shrubs.

Mordecai sits in the recess of the wall holding a scroll before him

MORDECAI

I cannot read, my mind is far away!
My wandering thoughts all hover round her still:
Alone and in the palace of the king,
Protected but by God and by herself.
Did I do wrong to send her into danger?
Why, all it needed was a little word:
She is of Judah's tribe; and they had sent her
Nay, even cast her off. Yet none shall say,
God's people are in any wise unworthy
Of any honor. And, after all, suppose
The king should let his eye — Esther is fair —
Should seat her at his side on Asia's throne,

arises

And Israel's ancient folk should rise anew
To wield the sword of wrath against the heathen
Who kept them down; the temple reared by Solomon
Arise out of the ashes of its shame
To be a joy and terror to the world,
Then could I bless my words, half rage, half guile,
Forbidding her to name her race and tribe.

When she then sits enthroned beside her lord
 I could approach them, saying: Prince of the Heathen,
 Can you find any fault in Israel?
 The wife you cherish, she is one of us.
 Reject her if you can. I am her uncle.
 That cannot be, though. Asia's lords are lewd,
 And strict and chaste the charms our daughters have.

sits down

Sit down again and read of ancient times
 Our modern times are only new, not good.

Enter the gatekeeper

GATEKEEPER

to Mordecai

I told you often: Here you cannot stay! —

shakes him

You! Listen!

MORDECAI

What?

GATEKEEPER

I say it is forbidden

To loiter at the threshold of the king.

MORDECAI

But I already told you why it is I tarry.

GATEKEEPER

Well yes, you are the father or the uncle
 Of one of those young girls they brought together
 So that the king — ha, ha! — might make his choice.
 He chose, however, not to choose. Have you not heard.
 The others scattered far and wide long since,
 Your girl, most likely, will be found among them.

MORDECAI

I led her here and here she will come back,
 If she is not refused a glad return.

GATEKEEPER

But next most surely comes the glad return,
 It seems to me, of Vashti, once our queen.

Quite right! Our lot at birth is to obey;
 But we obey more willingly our betters,
 Those in the cradle destined to command.

MORDECAI

Ere it had grown, the wood that made the cradle,
 Our house already ruled and over many.

GATEKEEPER

Too long a pause puts people out of practice
 And practice is what people mostly want.
 New rulers must abide by law and letter;
 The old, however, are like wind and rain:
 It blows, it falls yet no one queries why.

points off stage

But see the crowds are watching right and left;
 They sprouted up like toadstools at the news
 Our royal master's wedding came to naught.
 And if that isn't — as I live! — Be off!
 Sit down, do as you like, but only go.

*Mordecai again sits down in the recess of the
 wall. Enter the queen's colored chamber-
 lain, Hiram, wrapped in a cloak*

GATEKEEPER

goes to meet him

Oh, sir, you dared? Though fortune flowers anew;
 The king's espousal was but air and wind,
 And Princess Vashti will, I hope, return.

HIRAM

An unknown maiden stands, while we are talking
 As Ahasuerus' bride before the court.

GATEKEEPER

And you, you know it?

HIRAM

As you heard.

GATEKEEPER

Then we are lost.

HIRAM

There still are methods, though they are extreme ;

in an undertone

You take this letter, give it now, at once,
To Teresh, steward to the king, who serves,
Together with a friend but lately here,
The wine this day.

GATEKEEPER

Is it — ?

HIRAM

Why do you wait?

threatens him with uplifted finger

You do not dare refuse. And you know why.

GATEKEEPER

You see, I yield!

HIRAM

Go!

GATEKEEPER

But —

HIRAM

I shall await

An answer here, close-by. Be quick, but shrewd!

exit

GATEKEEPER

If only I were one who could refuse!

But it must be.

to Mordecai

You, good my friend,

Now show your gratitude for all the kindness

You have received from me.

MORDECAI

That you dismissed me?

GATEKEEPER

Those are the rules. At least you still are here.

A weighty matter now calls me away.

*aware that he still holds the letter in his hand,
he quickly thrusts it in his bosom*

You think that was a letter? No, a scrap,
 An unimportant, worthless scrap of paper
 I must deliver. You meanwhile remain
 And take my place. The staff here of my office,
 Who acts for me as I for him, like twins,
 I place beside you, then you are the gateman.
 Keep careful watch, that means: do as you like,
 Do not molest the great, refuse the small,
 Be gruff to anyone who speaks politely,
 Polite, if he is gruff. That is, in brief,
 The wisdom of each office. Soon I'll come
 And gladly pay your services in kind.

exit, through the castle gate

MORDECAI

remains seated as before

So now I am the king's exalted servant
 And made familiar with their wicked ways.
 Who doubts that some forbidden, crawling thing,
 Some hidden intrigue here makes fast its web?
 Would I but had my child, were in my hills;
 No fraud dwells there since lords do not, nor servants;
 Shall I not rather say: No one at all?
 Beloved pages, you are staunch and true.
 A book, though false, at least remains the same,
 While men, like apes, change as the moments change.

gets ready to read

Enter Teresh and Bigthan, from the right

TERESH

Wait here! It was before this gate, they said.

Bigthan stays behind, Teresh approaches Mordecai

TERESH

Are you the keeper?

MORDECAI

points to the staff leaning against the wall beside him

Here lie staff and office.

TERESH

Was not a black man here?

MORDECAI

A black man, yes!

He looked for some one blacker, so it seemed,
Though not of blacker skin. Are you the one?

TERESH

Why all this nonsense? Did he give a letter?

MORDECAI

He did.

TERESH

To Teresh, steward to the king?

MORDECAI

To — Teresh is the name? — And is it you?

TERESH

It is. Now give it here.

MORDECAI

I have it not.

TERESH

Who then?

MORDECAI

The porter, he whose place I take,
Went off to find you. You are Teresh, yes?

TERESH

And with the letter?

MORDECAI

That he took to give you.

TERESH

And went which way?

MORDECAI

Here — Or wait!

points to the right

That way.

TERESH

But we came that way now ourselves.

MORDECAI

Well, sir,

There always is but one straightforward way;
So many others, though, can be thought out,
That those on crooked paths are often lost.

TERESH

That way, you say?

to Bigthan

Come, let us find him, come!

TERESH

Should he meanwhile return —

MORDECAI

petulantly

Now get you gone!

Exeunt Teresh and Bigthan, to the right

MORDECAI

This venal troop revolts me, heart and mind!
Was it among such men you led your child:
Oh, my accursed cunning, sinful pride!
Here, where the king is slave of his own servants,
The slave is lord — of all but of himself —,
To rule and serve bring you an equal shame.

I hope she did not please, that noble maiden!
And yet this long delay to me is torment,
And I give heed to what these fools are doing
As fearfully as though it were my child,
And her own life for which this crowd throws dice.

Enter Haman from the palace gate

HAMAN

Air! Air! How narrow an escape. And yet,
And yet I triumphed. Thanks to you, my old,
My tried and trusty head. The king himself,
He put his signet on this hand of mine.
It beams, it glints! And all its glint is power.

Who lives that falls not to the dust before me?

Though there is one who now is seated still.
Perhaps he did not see.

stamps violently with his foot

What ails my shoe! —

He still keeps looking toward the ground. Ho, there,
My friend!

MORDECAI

looks up

Yes, what?

HAMAN

Yes, what! Do you mean me?

MORDECAI

I meant the one who called.

HAMAN

Well, that was I.

MORDECAI

Then you.

HAMAN

You do not know me.

MORDECAI

I hope not, no.

What I have seen till now about this place
Were bad intentions, treason and deceit.
Alas for you, were I to count you such!

HAMAN

For me? For you! Those I dislike
Are lost if I so much as wave my hand.

MORDECAI

Well, I do not like you; yet, see, I live.

keeps on reading

HAMAN

draws away from him

That well may be another stalwart spirit
Who would be strong and scorn the world and us.
Perhaps a Brahmin, even worse, a Jew.

But such a spirit needs a body though,
Which, as a body, can be fettered, killed.
The porter will some time tell me his name
And I, I'll write it here,

points behind his ear

and one day strike him.

He spoke? — He still is seated. — As you will!

prepares to leave, left, when Hiram steps up

HAMAN

But look! My fortune's shadow! And you wish?

HIRAM

Since now your house has bolts to keep me out
And as your ear gives heed to tones now new,
I must, a beggar, come before you here
With heaven arched above that hears and judges.

notices Mordecai

But we are not alone.

HAMAN

Let hear who will,

I cry aloud and everyone may know:

I serve the king and am his loyal subject.

As long as Princess Vashti was his wife

I kissed the earth on which her footsteps fell,

But since the king has planned to choose anew —

HIRAM

He planned? Not you?

HAMAN

A king does what he will,

We are but shadows, he alone the light.

Since then — to make a further explanation —

Queen Vashti is to me an alien creature,

Whom I know not, knew not, shall never know,

Unless my king shall raise her up again.

quickly, in an undertone

If you have something secret to impart,

Then tell my wife, let my good lady hear it.

again aloud

But now be off, or I shall look for help
And call for succor like a man of duty.

HIRAM

I leave, and think I know you, through and through.

exit at the left

HAMAN

You know me, do you? May it bring you luck!

to Mordecai

You heard him? Tell me, friend, what is your name?

MORDECAI

My name is Man; I am one. But if you
Stand next the king and can command his ear,
Then know: foul treason spins its lurking plots.
The black man, long a servant of Queen Vashti,
As I now know, exchanges secret letters
With one, cup bearer to your king, whose name
Is Teresh.

HAMAN

holds his hands over his ears

I cannot hear a word. Am deaf.

But you are blind; or you would recognize

holds out his hand

This token here, the signet of my lord.

This is enough. We shall discuss it further.

exit

MORDECAI

Why, I could laugh at this poor fool's conceit,
Did not a feeling, like a heavy stone,
Weigh on my breast that some rogue's villainy,
Some crime, maybe, is secretly at work
Which I suspect and yet cannot prevent.

Enter the gatekeeper

GATEKEEPER

Here are my thanks; and you may take your leave.

MORDECAI

You seem to be on crooked paths, good man.

GATEKEEPER

On crooked paths? On straight ones, all the time.
An hour ago I may indeed have been.
But my device at present reads: Hadassah,
Who sometimes is called Esther, as they say.

MORDECAI

How comes this maiden's name upon your lips?

GATEKEEPER

She is the one who is the king's young bride.

MORDECAI

My child?

GATEKEEPER

His child!

MORDECAI

So that was the foreboding,
That fell upon me as the wicked worked?
At her they aim, at her!

Out of my way!

For like a lioness, I shall force a path
Through spears and bristling swords until I reach her
And shield her, shield my child whom they would harm.
exit, through the palace gate
The curtain falls.

ACT III

Large hall in the royal palace. At the front, right, a table covered with a rug and surrounded by chairs.

Enter the king with Esther through the centre door followed by people of the court who remain at the rear

KING

Be calm, dear wife! It is the fate of kings
That, like the broad expanse of Heaven's aether,
They on the one hand reach all peaks of greatness
And on the other probe Hell's gloomy night,
Embrace them and pervade them: weal and woe.

ESTHER

Were it some other necessary evil;
But that because of me, of me, some harm
May come to you, no, that I cannot bear.

KING

So you think thus: to me, because of you?
I almost fear that since you now are mine,
They threaten with your death, nor am I wrong.
When I consider whence the blow has come,
The people they picked out to be their tools,
I find — the awe apart with which a king
Can hold and bind the simplest, least of men
In bonds invisible to human eyes —
No gain appears for that nefarious band
If it should be their king, be I who perish,

Whereas your death encourages their hope.

to one of the retinue

Where is the man who brought the paper here?

RETAINER

He came, requested audience with the queen,
And when, of course, they would not grant his plea,
He wrote the lines I handed you but now,
Then left, and since that time has not been seen.

withdraws

KING

It was, perhaps, one of those scandal mongers,
To me the most abhorred at any time,
Who hide their own ill-will, their own revenge,
Beneath the mask of duty, zealously performed.
We call them tell-tales and divide the shame:
Half each to him who tells, and him who listens.
It was, perhaps, one of those crawling creatures —

ESTHER

quickly

Not that.

KING

You know him, then?

ESTHER

I — do not, no!

KING

But what has happened to the lines he wrote?

ESTHER

searches her girdle

I do not know — they might be even lost.

KING

That would be bad. The names outweigh all else,
And no commitment where there is no witness.

ESTHER

takes a slip of paper from her bosom

Sire, here they are.

KING

The better. Give them here.

reads

“Queen Vashti is involved in secret plots
With one, called Teresh, steward to the king,
Be warned.”

And at the bottom: “Mordecai.”

ERRATA

Page 97, line 3 should read :

But I, I prophesy to you, proud king :

Page 111, line 13 should read :

Now to the suitor for his daughter's hand will Pharaoh give

Page 127, line 13 should read :

Seem proof of greatness that can scorn small matters.

Die Judim von Toledo main
832 7G859Jeb



3 1262 03237 1360

